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TWO MIRRORS

also by Peter de Polnay

Fiction

ANGRY MAN'S TALE
(revised edition in preparation)

BOO

CHILDREN, MY CHILDREN

WATER ON THE STEPS

Non-Fiction

DEATH AND TO-MORROW

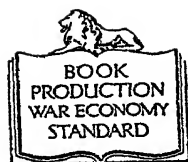
PETER DE POLNAY

TWO MIRRORS

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ONE

The sand was appalling. It came in through the closed windows of the dining-car, it came in through the fastened doors and I suppose the tables themselves exuded it. Anyway, they were covered with sand, and I sat there and drew shapeless figures with my forefinger like a child on a beach. Outside darkness was still in the offing. The vast desert of Rio Negro stretched towards the clouds. A gloomy sea; and everything was lifeless. The train stopped: the railway station had no name: just a number. The number was above a thousand, which meant that we were more than a thousand kilometres south-west from Buenos Aires. I think that number was more than thirteen hundred. I couldn't make it out on account of the sand. Nobody got out of the train. The train waited a little, then took a deep breath and was off. The station was a lonely building, a sort of outpost in the desert. No town, no village, only a couple of Ford tracks leading towards the dunes. But suddenly I saw two horsemen with a dog in their wake. The horses' hooves churned up the sand, the horsemen were silhouetted in black and grey against the sand, and the dog was having a difficult time with the sand. Then the lights came on in the dining-car.

I took a cigarette from the packet in front of me. The cigarette tasted of sand. I drew a gigantic O on the table and I thought I would ring for the dining-car attendant. It was, however, easier to think than to act in those gloomy surroundings.

"A fine view, this," a voice said behind me. "You can see for yourself how great our country is. A wonderful

landscape, this." The voice spoke remarkably good English with a slightly American intonation.

He was a tall man, very broad, in fact immense. Handsome in a dark aggressive manner. I had noticed him before. He had got in at Bahia Blanca: he had been in the dining-car as long as I.

"You will have a drink with me," he said and sat down. He rang the bell and an attendant with a kind of blue complexion came, and he ordered two whiskies. Now whisky is the posh drink in the Argentine. It costs anything from one peso and ten cents upwards, and is considered superior to the less snobbish San Martin. I had found that out during my fortnight's stay in Buenos Aires. I stayed at an hotel which was next door to a night club, and dawn would come with the band still playing "Adios Muchachos" and "Ça c'est Paris." The huge man took two peso notes from his waistcoat pocket, they were in a crumpled state, and found some coins in his trouser pocket and put the lot on the sand-covered table. The attendant came with a bottle of White Label and took the money without saying a word.

"It is better to pay at once," the stranger said. "He'll be furious," he added, "if I pour out more than two measures." In the cafés and bars they put the bottle on the table and the waiter, having marked the contents of the bottle before putting it on the table, adds up when he comes in answer to the eternal call, "Mozo, quiere cobrar?"

He poured a little whisky into my glass and said, "Say when." I said when, and because I couldn't think of anything else I asked him where he had learnt to speak such good English. Not that it mattered one way or the other.

"I was in the States," he said. "But I was in England, France and Spain, too. My name is Achaval and my father is a senator." He took a cigarette from my packet of Hudsons. "I am glad to be back in my great country." He looked out through the window. Darkness was nearer. Like an immense horseshoe above the sand.

"A very desolate view," I said. I didn't say that aggressively, though after a fortnight in the country I had become tired of the continuous reference to Argentine's greatness.

El gran país, the great country; and this sandy desert was another proof that God had created the Argentine on the eighth day, taking advantage of all He had learnt the first six days and feeling stronger because of His rest on the seventh.

"Not at all," Achaval said. "This is a grand view."

We were few and far between in the dining-car. A lone man wearing bombachas sat and dozed at a table on our left. At the other end of the dining-car there was a noisy group: four men to be precise, and they were drinking champagne. They must have been people of weight and importance, for they weren't served by the dining-car attendant but by a huge negro in a dark blue suit. When he wasn't serving, the negro sat at a nearby table, his arms folded.

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Over there?" Achaval turned his head round and then turned it back to me and said, "The fat man is a newspaper proprietor in Buenos Aires. The other fellows are his editors or secretaries. The nigger is his bodyguard. He's armed, of course."

"And what are they doing on this train?" I asked.

"He has an estancia here in Rio Negro. He's going there to have a rest. He is a very, very rich man."

"And a very noisy man."

"A rich man has every right to be noisy. Besides, we enjoy life in our great country."

We had finished our drinks, so I took the bottle and poured out some more. Achaval was a fast drinker.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To Zapala," I said.

"That is the terminus of the line. A great railway line, the Southern Railway."

"It's English." That did not interest him.

"And what are you going to do there?" he asked.

"I am going to my brother who has a sheep farm South of Zapala."

"You will see wonderful views there. The Andes. Beautiful mountains covered with snow. High trees and millions of sheep. It is a young man's country. A land

of great possibilities. You will be happy there." He said that as though he were giving me a present.

"And where are you going?" I asked.

"First I wanted to go to Neuquen, but now that I've talked to you, laddie, I am going with you as far as Zapala." That was rather surprising. "Has your brother a large estancia?"

"I believe he has," I said. "I don't know. Never been there before."

Of course it was large, though not as large as many of the estancias in Patagonia. During our childhood we had heard a lot about Uncle Charles's estancia. An uncle in Patagonia doesn't come the way of many children. And it had been arranged from time immemorial that my brother Derek should step into the Patagonian shoes after Uncle Charles died. Later, as we grew older, one heard less of those plans. Uncle Charles was a robust man, much stronger than our Mr. Edmett, Derek's father. So it was decided that Derek would become a barrister; our mother fancied the idea. Derek was at Oxford when Uncle Charles died and from Oxford he went to the estancia. Now he was twenty-nine, three years younger than I, and I hadn't seen my half-brother for nearly eight years.

"Will you be working on your brother's estancia?" Achaval asked.

"That's the idea," I said, and as our glasses were empty I poured out two drinks from the bottle.

Achaval took another cigarette from my packet. "Is your brother married?" he asked. There was nothing offensive in that host of questions. Children like to tabulate and pigeon-hole and therefore they put many questions. Yet the Argentines aren't child-like; just childish. At least so it struck me after a fortnight.

"Yes, he is married," I said, and in order to save him from putting the next question I volunteered the information that he had been married for three years and his wife came from Bahia Blanca.

"There are very beautiful women in Bahia Blanca," he said. "All our women are beautiful."

"My brother tells me that his wife is very beautiful."

It was difficult to imagine Derek married, and married to boot to a beautiful woman; provided she was beautiful, which I didn't know. But he used to say in his letters that his wife was beautiful and that he was happy with her. I had never thought that Derek had the capacity to be happy. Still, it was good to know that at least one member of our family was happy, and in a sense it was part and parcel of unpredictable fate that it should be Derek. Taciturn, shy and slightly grim, Derek had envied Mary and me because he was born into the stalwart upper middle classes whereas Mary and I hadn't had a father at all. His wife, it seemed to me, must put up with a lot. But that was their business.

"Very few of the English who live here marry our women," Achaval said. He was eyeing the whisky-bottle, but I didn't want to drink more. Anyhow, it was his round. I looked at the window and the sand had dissolved into darkness. There was a terrific wind outside. The bodyguard had apparently become tired of sitting and had stood up, and was now hovering near his master's table. The newspaper proprietor had a rug round his legs. The dining-car was well heated, but it must have been cold outside what with the wind and the sand. One member of the party was asleep. He had been drunk before falling asleep.

"As you're the brother of an estanciero," Achaval said, "we could have another drink. I have only two pesos left. I am broke."

"Broke?"

"Down and out."

"I am down and out, too." I had to say that not only because it was true but simply because I couldn't resist saying it.

"But you have a rich brother."

"My brother is well off. But aren't you the son of a senator?"

He laughed. He wasn't likeable, but his laugh was pleasant. "My father can't stand the sight of me," he said. "I am going South to look for a job. I want to find a chacra somewhere. Do you know what a chacra is?" And he explained that a chacra is a bit of rented land, and if one is a hard worker

one can make a decent living out of a chacra. "We have a beautiful song about that," he said. "Chacarero, chacarero," and he sang a little and then he winked at me, and then I poured out a couple of drinks. "You're a good chap, laddie," he said.

The drink began to depress me and I wished he would leave me alone. The train stopped and the attendant came up to the newspaper proprietor and spoke to him respectfully. The newspaper proprietor waved a podgy white hand and a member of his party took out a wallet and paid the large bill. They woke up the sleeping drunk who became brisk and sober. The Negro took a couple of crocodile suit-cases, most expensive affairs, and the newspaper proprietor and his retinue left the train.

"He has his estancia round here," Achaval said superfluously. He added, "I tried to speak to him earlier in the day, but the bodyguard wouldn't let me. I wanted to borrow a few dollars from him."

"So you know him?"

"Don't be silly, laddie. Never met the bastard in my life."

A short man with spectacles and fair hair got in and sat down and took from his pocket a copy of the *Buenos Aires Herald* and began to read.

"He is English," Achaval whispered to me. He had wet lips, and when whispering he spat a lot. Evidently he was out to make friends with the newcomer, for he started to speak loudly in English; but the bespectacled person, having given us a glance, returned to his paper and took no further notice of us.

"Yes," Achaval said as the train pulled out, "in our great country everybody has a chance to live. One day you're up, the next day you might be down. Nobody despises you for that. It's very different from Europe. Only money and success matter over there." He poured out two more drinks. 'He will make me drunk,' I thought and I didn't want to be drunk and I didn't want to arrive at Zapala with a hangover. 'I was always afraid that you might become a drunkard,' Derek would say. That was the sort

of thing he would say. He could make one tremble with fury and remain blissfully unaware of the hurting texture of his words. But probably most of us are like that.

"No more for me," I said, but first I emptied my glass.

The whisky and the rhythm of the wheels made me feel heavy and the thought that had been so often with me since my sister Mary's death came back and settled down within me. It said that it was just no good going on with it and wouldn't define what it meant. No good to try, and there was nothing worth trying. I said all that to myself and the next moment there rose in me deep homesickness for the life that had left me high and dry. "You said you'd been to France," I said to Achaval. "Were you there a long time?"

"Two years, but I've been to England, too." I wasn't interested in the second half of his statement. England had been the first phase of my life and I could have it all over again when talking to Derek. I had shared that with him. France I had shared with Mary, and Mary was dead. Yes, France was a different matter. A closed book; and the closing of the book wasn't of my doing. Now with the whisky in me and the dullness of the darksome night around me I repeated to myself that nothing had been worth while since Paris. I no longer lived there and Mary was dead.

"Vous parlez Français?" I asked in order to hear my voice speaking French.

"Naturellement," Achaval said, and his accent was the accent one heard at such night clubs as the El Garron and the Palermo. He lapsed into English again. "I was broke in Paris and I took South Americans to the Louvre for a tip."

"Are you interested in pictures?"

"Not me," he said, and drank more whisky. It was getting darker and the night outside showed the bulbs of the dining-car.

"I just can't believe," I said, "that this is the end of winter. The beginning of September. Too topsy-turvy. Will there be snow at Zapala?"

"Probably. I don't know laddie. Never been there before." He thought for a moment and his thoughts must have been pleasant, for he smiled. "I knew a man who went South without a cent, just as I'm going South right now. In five years he made about a million."

"How?"

"I wish I knew. Stealing sheep I guess."

"Is there much stealing going on round here?"

"Plenty. It's a very crooked country." He laughed indulgently and patriotically. "Good old Patagonia," he added. "A great free country."

The train had stopped and the man with the *Buenos Aires Herald* left us. We were alone in the dining-car, but not for long. At the very last minute a priest got in. He went and sat at the table where the newspaper proprietor's merry party had sat. He took out his breviary and read with his lips moving soundlessly.

"I don't like priests," Achaval said.

"But I do," I said, and of course I thought of my friend Jean-François. "Try to work it out for yourself," Jean-François had said when I went to see him in Lyons. "How?" I asked wearily. He said I knew perfectly well what he meant. "I like them very much," I said to Achaval. He shrugged his shoulders.

The dining-car attendant came in and asked us if we wanted to eat. I didn't feel hungry and I looked up to say that I didn't want dinner, but Achaval eyed me with slightly dilated pupils and probably he hadn't lunched, so I said dinner for two. I wouldn't have much money left and Derek would have to give me an advance. I didn't cherish the idea of asking him for money. I still had a hundred pounds of the money Mr. Edmett so kindly left to me, but under no circumstances would I break into them. 'Here goes,' I said to the table-cloth which the attendant had spread on top of the dust.

"You're a grand chap, laddie," Achaval said. The attendant first served the priest. Achaval watched him avidly.

"Do you speak Spanish?" he asked when the hors d'œuvres arrived.

"Yes," I said. "I think it's a lovely language and I learnt it in Paris. And I've been to Spain, too."

"Funny to learn a language you don't need for the moment," he said. "But you must learn to speak it with our accent."

"I think the Argentine accent is hideous." He didn't heed me: he was waiting for the next course.

So this world was a crooked world and I couldn't visualize Derek living in a crooked world. But he was a born hermit and crooked or not crooked, he would always stay aloof and apart. Still, I hadn't seen him for seven years and he might have changed. Married life; especially being married to a woman of a completely alien race. Moreover, one gathers moss after twenty-five whether one likes it or not. Moss is green but plushy. But who was I to talk of moss?

"When I was in the States," Achaval said, "I used to be Jack Dempsey's sparring partner." I believed him.

The dinner consisted mainly of chicken. Puchero is the staple Argentine diet. Chicken is the Sunday diet. The first is puchero of beef, the latter is puchero of chicken. Achaval ate wolfishly and used his knife indiscriminately. I ate because I had ordered the dinner. When the meal was over I paid the bill, and I had only fifteen pesos left. I hated Achaval since I would have to ask Derek so soon for money.

The train would reach Neuquen around ten and there would be a connection to Zapala first thing to-morrow. First thing to-morrow was six in the morning. "What is one supposed to do between ten at night and six in the morning?" I asked.

"I'll take you to a fonda," he said. "We'll have a few drinks and we'll find a bed." He was completely in charge of me. The priest had finished eating, crossed himself and stared at us without seeing us. Then he picked his teeth and a little later returned to his breviary. Achaval talked of his family. They were very well off. His father was a lawyer and a senator and thrived on graft. He, Achaval, was the black sheep of the family and he was neither proud nor ashamed of it. He had a wife and two children. His

father looked after his wife and the kids and he had spent recently three months in Buenos Aires without having seen them. "My wife is ashamed of me," he said. "She would like me to live like all the people she knows. Mind you she comes from one of our aristocratic families. I am a Criollo aristocrat too." He wore a well-cut suit but it was practically in rags. "I don't like my family," he announced.

I wished I could say that; how much easier things would be. But it was the other way round, and it had been like that from the start. To love Mary had been easy. It would have been difficult to withhold love from her. I was very fond of Mr. Edmett, who was no relation of ours. Mary and I used to laugh at him with the intolerance of childhood. But when he fell off a hired hack one summer afternoon (Mr. Edmett, like Sir Robert Peel, was the kind of person who would fall off hired hacks) and was lame for a fortnight, a boy of ten, I offered to carry him down the stairs because it was so saddening to see him hobble downstairs step by step. But on the other hand when Derek was six years old, having overheard Mary and me discussing the eternally unsolved problem of our father's identity, he volunteered to go out into the world and find him for us. That was like Derek, and now suddenly I felt less depressed because I would be seeing him to-morrow. I wished I had already arrived at our destination.

"But what are you going to do down South?" I asked Achaval.

"If I knew I'd tell you," he said. "Carajo, something will turn up. Ours is a great country, full of opportunities." He spoke again of his wife and said it had been difficult after living in the States and in Europe to re-enter the harem of Argentine domestic life.

"Your women always sit at home?" I asked.

"They sit at home," he said, "and that's exactly what they should do. Mucking about with your friends' wives is unknown here. If a man tries it he gets a knife into his belly."

"But have women no say in the matter?"

"Laddie, you're talking rot."

Ten o'clock came at last and we reached Neuquen a few minutes later. For the last half-hour the dining-car attendant had been putting his house, or rather the dining-car, in order. I had felt so much that I was overstaying my welcome that the station of Neuquen seemed almost hospitable to me. Achaval had no luggage, but I went to the luggage-van and found my cabin-trunk, and as there were no porters about he helped me with the trunk. We deposited it in a small shed where there were a few suit-cases, tyres, a couple of sheep and a fine red setter chained to the wall. The setter had a label attached to its collar. A very lonely dog, I thought, and then the setter looked up and whimpered and then put its nose on its paw. A dejected, elegant animal; and we went out. It was ice cold and the night was bright, as though it were feasting off icicles. The scanty strange stars were like silver pin-points, alive and frozen. The town was dead and quiet. A couple of Fords and a lorry stood outside the station.

"Come with me, laddie," Achaval said. We crossed the square and reached the road. The road was well lighted and the electric pylons, horrible monsters, stretched far into the night.

"Do you have such illumination all over the place?" I couldn't help asking.

"Electricity is very cheap here," Achaval said.

There were a few houses right and left of the road, but soon they would drop away and there would come abomination of desolation with electric light going on for ever. "Here is the fonda," Achaval said.

We went in and there was the customary oleograph on the wall depicting Sarmiento crossing the Andes; or perhaps it was San Martin. I always mix them up. I do know, however, that there was a great Argentine admiral called *Almirante Brown*. Achaval ordered a couple of *cañas*. Two men in bombachas stood at the counter and one of them was drunk and swayed and had the face of a villain. The other looked like the father of twins. A gramophone was playing a tango and a young girl attended to the gramophone. She played that same tango all the time we were

in the bar. They must have played that record for years and they would go on playing it. Then two amazing creatures came in and they were like a picture of Esquimeaux in an old-fashioned illustrated atlas. "What are they?" I asked.

"Indians," Achaval said.

After a childhood spent with Fenimore Cooper it came as a shock to see real Red Indians so small and degenerate.

"We'll get a room," Achaval said; "and what is more, laddie, I'm going to bed." A woman took us across a courtyard and at the end of the courtyard stood a long low building. She opened the door. "I am very sleepy," Achaval said. It appeared that the whole building was but one narrow room. Four beds were ranged in a row and the general impression was of a hospital in pre-Florence Nightingale days with the first battles of the Crimean war going at full swing. Incidentally the room was cold, but a small brasero was smoking beside the only bed that was tenanted.

"We'll put the brasero beside our beds," Achaval said.

"Three pesos," the woman said. She smiled nicely as she said that.

"Add the two cafías to it, señorita," Achaval said.

The drinks were added to the three pesos and, with a benign smile, Achaval watched me fork out the money. Then he became busy with the brasero and he made more noise in the shifting than was expedient. But the man in the bed didn't wake up.

"Who will rouse us in the morning?" I asked.

"This isn't Paris," Achaval said with a laugh. "We'll have to wake up all on our own. Puta, I am tired." He began to undress which meant that he took off his coat, jacket and trousers, warmed his legs near the embers of the brasero and got into bed. He pulled the blankets wellnigh over his head. A little later his head emerged, he took his overcoat and hoisted it on top of the blankets, and his head disappeared for the night. The man in the corner was snoring intermittently and I could hear the woman closing and bolting the door of the fonda.

What with the lack of air and the dying stench of the

brasero I had no desire to go to bed. I went up to the bed and gazed at it with repugnance, though the sheets were comparatively clean. The bed was unfriendly ; moreover, I wasn't sleepy. I opened the door and there was the courtyard with the stars above, cold but very much alive. I went across the courtyard, tried the door of the fonda, knocked on it and there was no reply. I turned to the left. The gate was open and I found myself on the deserted high road, and the electric lights in two long lines marched into distance and there they seemed to meet. There was nobody about and I began to pace up and down.

I looked up at the stars and tried to find the Southern Cross. I couldn't locate it. The third night of my stay in Buenos Aires, in the middle of Maipu, I suddenly saw the Southern Cross. Clearly ; and I never succeeded in spotting it again. Anyway, it had been a disappointment. Now I wondered whether Dominique was out or in at this time of the night. Then I remembered that even time was different over there. But be it day or night over there Dominique must be doing something or other at this very moment. Sleeping or eating or sitting in his office. Whatever it was I timidly hoped that it wasn't partaking of sorrow ; for that should be left to me alone. And let him dislike me : I disliked him even more. Besides, I conceded, it couldn't have been fun to carry, so to speak, one's wife's brother on one's shoulders. He had had to do that for seven years. I stopped ; lit a cigarette ; my hands were numb with cold. I walked on and saw a man on horseback coming from the town. The horse moved in that curious half-step, half-canter of Criollo horses. The man sat well back as though sitting on a chair. He was in uniform and I said to myself a vigilante, a policeman, and of the mounted variety at that. He called out good night and I said good night, and he rode on between the lights.

How had Dominique and Derek got on ? Funny, both their names began with a D. I hadn't thought of that before. They had met once or twice before Derek left for the Argentine. Derek's complete devotion and loyalty to me had changed into intolerance and jealousy, or perhaps into

something more subtle for which I couldn't find a name. To love Mary so much and yet for Mary to prefer me. To be so completely different from us who because his father had adopted us had the same name. Be that as it may those hurt dark eyes of Derek had shown that he was at a distance, on the other side, and neither Mary nor I did anything to bring him over or to shorten the distance. He had reached the conclusion that I wouldn't go far in life. Then he left and that was seven years ago. I threw away the cigarette-end and thought of Dominique. As one grows older one views, with a certain amount of detached sarcasm, one's earlier efforts, and therefore, underneath the cold stars and the impersonal arc lights I wondered that Mary hadn't forced Dominique to take me along on their honeymoon.

Dominique's mother was the proprietor of a string of café restaurants of the Dupont type. Mother and son were pleasantly well off. I worked in their office till Mary's death, and I was in the department which dealt with the laundry side of the firm. They used to lose a lot of napkins and table-cloths in the laundries and it was part of my job to write the sort of threatening letters which either have results or haven't and in the long run cut no ice. Dominique's cousin, Eugène Barlet, was my boss.

"You will never understand our French ways," he said at least twice a week; and that hurt me because I had hoped that France stood as near to me as I stood to France. "Your letters have no strength," was generally his next remark.

He was definitely a man of strength. The vituperative quality of his letters was only offset by the more vituperative answers the laundries gave. However, my position was more difficult than his: my hunting ground was less happy. He dealt with losses whereas my modest contribution was to raise my voice at the wear and tear of laundries. But I liked Eugène because he was unambitious and there still lingered in him the peasant of the Ardèche. He was always helpful and we had been real friends. He gave in friendship and affection all I was willing to take from him. Dominique, on the other hand, was ambitious and he liked the flashy atmosphere of Deauville and later, Le Touquet. It wasn't his

fault. With a wife like Mary he couldn't resist going to smart restaurants and showing her off in Cannes and places like that. Mary thought that was fun. Yes, I said to the nearest pylon, Mary had enjoyed smart restaurants and Cannes. She didn't know better. Perhaps some day I would know better. I doubted that.

Two short figures came out through a gate. They were Red Indians and they were drunk and reeled to and fro in a small way. They went past me reeking of caña and I said buenas noches and they didn't answer.

But I wished I remembered how Dominique and Derek had got on. I tried to force an opening into those hidden layers of memory. I wasn't successful. Anyway, what did it matter? Mary was dead; and I looked at the cold frozen stars and again, maybe for the thousandth time, I said that if there was a hereafter then why didn't she give me a sign? Just a small sign that I should know that there was still a Mary somewhere, even if less alive outside me than within me.

I was tired and cold. My tongue was parched with the stale taste of the afternoon's whisky. I looked hard at the stars and if a small handkerchief had fluttered from one of them I would have been surprised but not frightened. I must go to sleep, I said, and went in through the open gate and opened the door of the guest-house. The brasero had gone out and the room was pitch dark. I switched the light on and the lone naked electric bulb turned a stretch of the whitewashed wall blindingly white. I chose the bed nearest to Achaval. The stranger, a man with a lot of hair and a sallow thin face, was lying on his back and was snoring aggressively. I took my pyjamas out of my suit-case, looked at the bed and then at my pyjamas and decided to sleep in my underwear. There was no washstand in the room, so with the grime and sand of travel I got under the sheets, but remembered the light, so I got up, switched off the light, and with a burning match in my hand returned to the bed. As I hadn't taken my socks off, my feet didn't pick up the dirt of the boards.

Before falling asleep I thought of having to wake up in time

to catch the train. It must be past midnight. I didn't care. If I overslept I would send Derek a telegram and tell him I'd be two days late as there was a train to Zapala only three times a week. He would say: so like William, and it was satisfying and sleep inspiring to know that he would say that. I dropped into the very depth of sleep, but I didn't stay there long enough. When I awoke it was four-thirty and I had an hour and a half before the train left. I lay a while smoking. The stranger was snoring and there was no sound from Achaval. Now and then I looked in his direction. His head was invisible. At five I rose and put on my shoes and trousers and went out into the courtyard. The cold was terrible. It was calm, purposeful, and you knew it was the master, the one and only. I had some vague idea about washing, but abandoned it on account of the cold and I went back and tied my tie and put on my coat and the overcoat followed immediately; and then I shivered. I should, I thought, wake up Achaval. He had said that he was going to Zapala, though his plans were pretty obscure. But they had nothing to do with me and so I shook him and his right fist shot out and I just managed to dodge it. It would have knocked me down, of that I have no doubt. "Get up," I said in a loud voice. His fist returned to the warm side of the blanket but the other party woke up.

"What is it? What is it?" he asked. "For the love of God what is it?" He spoke in thin frightened tones.

"Nothing, señor," I said. "I'm trying to wake him up."

"Oh," the man said. "Oh, I thought there was some trouble." He smoothed his hair with his hand. "There is so much trouble." His hand emphasised that there was a lot of trouble. "What is the time?"

I told him and I moved away from Achaval and with outstretched arms I gave the blanket a tug. This time he pushed off the blanket and looked at me furiously. In angry Spanish he asked what the time was.

"Get up," I said, "or you'll miss your train."

"If you dare to wake me again I'll knock your block off."

I turned away and walked over to the sallow stranger.

He was sitting up in bed smoking a cigarette. His nose was red with cold.

"He is angry," he said in a whisper.

"None of my business," I said. "If he doesn't get up he'll miss his train, but I don't care."

"But you might have trouble if he misses his train. Be friendly and make him get up and then there won't be trouble with them when you arrive together and look after one another."

"What do you mean by them?" The man must be a half-wit.

"Your firm," he said. "You're travelling for a firm, aren't you?"

"No," I said. "I'm not. Nor is he, and I just met him in the train."

"Then he shouldn't be angry. He should be grateful."

As a matter of fact Achaval had arisen and was dressing. The little man leaned out of bed and put out his cigarette on the floor. "I'll clean the room when I get up," he said. "One doesn't want trouble, does one?"

I wanted to smoke because that was the only thing left to do apart from feeling and wellnigh seeing the cold. I took out a packet and offered him a cigarette.

"No, thank you; no, thank you. You keep your own. We should be happy with what we have and we should neither give nor take." Then he told me he was an Italian and travelled for an insurance company for the last fifteen years. "Dotas para niñas," he said. He explained that it was his job in that cold climate to induce parents to cough up money for their daughters' dowries. If the parents survive their daughters they get the dowries. "But they are bad, the Argentines," he said. "Especially here in the South. I am an Italian. I come from Lucca." His mouth trembled, both lips together. "They are bad and you are a foreigner like me. We must beware of them. They are bad and cruel."

Achaval was dressed and came over. "It was nice of you to wake me, laddie," he said. "But I hate getting up so early in the morning. Never mind." He slapped my

shoulder and then he yawned. It was a comfortable cosy yawn. "I wouldn't mind a hot bath. Come on, let's try and get some coffee."

I went back to the bed, closed my suit-case and started for the door. The Italian stretched out an emaciated hand and I took it. He wished me goodbye and added that his name was Gianpietro Ricciutti and he was at my service. The cold was waiting for us in the courtyard.

"What was he?" Achaval asked. "A Gallego or an Italian?"

"An Italian."

"Cheap trash," he said. "Foreigners are trash. The English are all right, so are the Germans, but all these Turks, Russians, Italians—they're no bloody good." He knocked on the door of the fonda, then as there was no answer he clapped his hands, and as there was still no answer he said it was too early.

"We'd better go to the station," I said.

"Wait," he said. He stood and sniffed. "Come this way. He took me to the back of the fonda and there was a shed, and two men sat beside a fire and they were drinking maté. Achaval said good morning and they bade us sit down, and we drank maté and it was bitter and warm. The conversation consisted of monosyllables and even the monosyllables were rare.

"They drive a lorry," Achaval explained. We were less cold; we thanked them and walked down to the station. A Ford car snorted past us, otherwise the road was as deserted as it had been the night before. One could hear sounds of shunting from the station and the stars were getting ready to leave. The electric light seemed to wish to stay there for ever.

The Irish setter was still in the waiting-room but a blanket had been thrown over it. The sheep had gone. We had plenty of time left. Lone coaches and trucks came rolling along without aim or purpose, and it was unbelievable that these stray coaches and trucks would soon turn into something as positive as a train. Achaval asked for a cigarette.

"I could go without food," he said, "but not without

smokes." I gave him a cigarette. "You have a good supply of cigarettes," he said. I gave him a match. "Do you know your brother's wife?" he asked.

"No," I said.

"Will you be living in the same house with them?"

"I suppose so."

"Don't. It's better to keep away from other men's women."

"What do you mean by that?" I was amused. The haremite Argentine again.

"There is always trouble when women are about."

"I don't think I'll have trouble with my brother's wife."

"She'll either like you or dislike you, and each will be unpleasant for you. Keep out of it."

"You're the second person today who talks of trouble."

I smiled, but I was a little frightened; for I knew nothing of Derek's wife. Often if one knows the husband one can draw a pretty accurate picture of the wife. I couldn't do that where Derek was concerned. If I tried to draw a mental picture of his wife I would but find a hazy figure without character or personality. He was such a forceful person one could only visualize him as standing and living alone. But he might have changed in seven years. I hoped he had. "Don't you worry," I said and started to walk up and down the platform.

The coaches and trucks settled down at last. There was now the finished article: a train, and ready to leave. The train was practically empty. It seemed to me that Achaval and I were the sole passengers. We got into a compartment and the train pulled out and the guard came and asked for our tickets. Achaval showed him a bit of stamped cardboard with a photograph attached to it. The guard looked at it for a long while and eventually, with a somewhat dejected movement, handed it back to him. When he had left us I asked Achaval what that cardboard was. He grinned. He had thick curly lips and they conveyed a grin better than anything I'd ever seen.

"A journalist's pass," he said. "A friend lent it to me. I must return it to him. Anyway, it can't be used again, curse him."

I became violently sleepy. I dozed off and it was a cold and shivering early morning sleep. I woke up now and again and I fell back into slumber, and I didn't quite know when I was sleeping and when I was awake. I had curious dreams: they were endless and had no beginning. They were mostly about Dominique and he was pathetic, arrogant and sarcastic. But he had been like that all along. He came often into my dreams. So did Mary. But since her death I had trained myself to disbelieve dreams about her. Whenever I saw her in my dreams I immediately said no kidding, I know she is dead. Now she popped up beside Dominique, but it didn't hurt because she wasn't among the living. Acha-val's voice came through and it said that the train was climbing, and I opened my eyes and through a blurr I saw trees and rocks and then back to my dream and Dominique was waiting for me. Dominique and I had both been pupils of the Lycée Louis le Grand in Paris.

Dominique had met Mary through me. To send me to school in Paris was Mr. Edmett's idea and my mother had approved of it. Their position was difficult, especially my mother's. I suppose before he married her he had declared that he would look after her children as if they were his own. It was easy to say that at the time. However, a year later Derek made his entrance into their world and many problems arose. The years didn't lessen them. Mr. Edmett wanted to give his own son the best education money could buy; but what about the other boy who wasn't his child? He couldn't afford to send both boys to expensive public schools. Not that he wasn't comfortably off, but he had many expenses and his investments were the sort of investments that slowly dwindle. Every year he was ever so slightly poorer. Besides, he thought that if I went to school in England the truth would eventually leak out. Boys are cruel. And then Mlle Delorme, our French governess, came to the rescue. Why not send me to school in France? Mr. Edmett asked her which was the best school in France? Mlle Delorme

considered that the Louis le Grand was the best lycée in France. Mr. Edmett made the necessary arrangements.

First he sent me to an old French gentleman in London who prepared me for the hard labour of French lycée life. A year later I was in Paris. I sobbed bitterly when Mr. Edmett kissed me goodbye as I knew that I wouldn't be seeing him, mother and Mary till Christmas. He was completely bald; prematurely aged; and he wore without distinction the sort of moustache that inevitably gets in the way of the soup. That day of the *rentrée des classes* he was even more moved than I.

"Look," said Achaval, "just look."

I opened my eyes and I only saw wetness and through the wetness the outlines of some trees. My eyelids came down and I swayed with the motion of the train, and Mary and Dominique had gone and there stood before me Derek and his Argentine wife against whom Achaval had warned me. Of course it wasn't his wife. How could it be? I didn't know her. So I looked hard and it was Muriel, silly plain Muriel. Muriel lived not far from Mr. Edmett's house. Mr. Edmett's house was two miles out of Exmouth and thus most of my childhood had been spent in far South Devon. Muriel's mother was the widow of a Naval officer. Mother and daughter were genteel creatures and at the age of nineteen Derek wanted to marry Muriel. Mr. Edmett said no and mother said no and Derek fretted, then gave in. Rebellion wasn't his forte. There is something human in rebellion. Derek said yes daddy, and yes mother, and Muriel had to start looking elsewhere for a husband. And now here she was in my dream.

"Come on, laddie, you've slept enough," said Achaval. He was bored. "You slept for over three hours. We're nearly in Zapala." He shook me in no mean manner and whether I liked it or not he shook me back into reality. Funny I hadn't had time to look at Derek: Muriel had monopolized my dream.

"Look out through the window," Achaval commanded. "What a beautiful view. Laddie, I'm proud to be a Criollo."

The trees had gone and there were huge boulders and

many rocks and stones, and we were chugging upward and the landscape was becoming more and more barren as though a whirlwind in bygone ages had swept it all clear. "Looks pretty sad to me," I said.

"You're a fool," Achaval said. He could say such things almost with grace. "Our country is great and free."

There was now a third person in the compartment. A woman wrapped in a huge shawl with a wicker basket in her lap. She was dark and the colour of her face was that of a red apple. She listened with relish to our outlandish conversation. From time to time she nodded and her nod said: 'I told you so.' Achaval spoke to her in Spanish and she grunted and didn't want to be drawn into the talk.

"She's a stupid woman," Achaval said. He said that in English and the woman was interested again and nodded, and her nod said quite plainly: 'I told you so.' "Common women are very ignorant round here," Achaval added. He crossed his legs and gave me back my packet of Hudsons "I took them from your pocket, laddie. I didn't want to wake you."

I helped myself to one of my own cigarettes and Achaval took the packet back. We sat in silence and the desolation of the outside world was becoming complete. There was intermittent sunshine and the stones looked like so many skulls. The train turned northward and the Cordilleras came into view. They were an endless background mounting to the sky. Snow half-way up; and then the snow rose to the sky. There was something surprisingly theatrical about that mountain chain. It was painted on the edge of the horizon and not very realistically at that.

"On the other side of the mountains," said Achaval, "is Chile." I believed him. There could be anything on the other side of those mountains. Tropical beasts, peacocks, endless cemeteries: in short, anything. The train slowed down. "We are in Zapala," said Achaval. His voice implied that I should thank him for having brought me to my destination. The woman with the apple face hurried out into the corridor. "The cow," said Achaval.

TWO

Derek was on the platform. I saw him at once. He stood there leaning on his stick, wearing riding breeches and riding boots. His boots were shiny. He waited till the train came to a halt and then began to walk along, looking into every compartment. It was all very deliberate. A peon was walking beside him. A sallow-faced man with a dark moustache, wearing bombachas. As they walked side by side it was as if two continents were moving together; or rather two utterly different civilizations, both in time and in space.

"There is my brother," I said to Achaval. He said something, but I didn't listen to him. I put my head through the window and shouted, "Derek." He saw me and first nodded, then smiled his cautious smile. I jumped out of the carriage, and as I went up to him I noticed for the first time in my life that he had the same mouth as my sister Mary; and my next thought was that the last time I had seen him Mary was still alive.

"Well, Derek?" I said.

"Well, William?" We shook hands and I was very much moved, and he smiled again timidly, defensively. "Pedro will get your luggage," he said. He turned to the peon. "This is my brother." The peon and I shook hands. His was a hearty handshake. I stood with Derek while Pedro went to collect the luggage. There weren't many people about, yet even so Derek was amazingly a stranger among them. One could easily have believed that he had just arrived by that train.

"We will lunch here," Derek said. "After lunch we'll go home."

"Do you live far from here?"

"Twenty-five miles away. We'll eat at the hotel. I hardly know it. Usually I only come here on business."

Apparently my arrival had nothing to do with business. "I like the mayor. He's very helpful," he said, and we were both silent, and in that silence Achaval walked past us. I didn't look at him. Then Pedro came with my luggage and another man was helping him. We went out.

"Where is the town?" I asked.

"This is the town," he said. There were about fifteen small houses, some corrugated iron sheds and that was all. I looked down the line and the railway-line came to a complete stop about a hundred yards away.

"Looks like the end of the world," I said.

"They intend to build the line across the mountains to Chile."

"Oh, I hope not. It's more exciting like this." He gave me a look which was a curious look, and started to walk to his car. It was a Chevrolet, 1927 model. Pedro and the stranger put the luggage in and Derek sat at the wheel and I sat beside him. I ought to say something about his wife, I thought, but didn't know how to begin. And when should I mention Mary? I didn't know that, either. But this silence was no good, so I said, "I have so much to tell you that I don't know where to begin." I wished I could leave it at that.

He gave me a quick glance. "We have plenty of time," he said in a final voice.

I waited and then I said, "Still keen on driving?" He had had a passion for cars. He knew cars inside out and was an excellent driver. When his eighth birthday was approaching his father had asked him what he wanted for a present. He said he wanted a motor-car. Now motor-cars in those days were very expensive and the goal of a lifetime's hope and success. Mr. Edmett misunderstood him and bought him a toy motor-car with which Derek never played.

"Quite keen," he said, "but the roads are abominable. This is the only sort of car that's of any use here. And Fords."

We were by then outside a long whitewashed building which bore the legend, "Hotel Universal." We alighted and all three of us went inside. We entered a vast room with

the bar facing the door and the restaurant in the left corner. There was a proud array of bottles behind the bar; the restaurant consisted of a few rickety tables and the table-cloth was filthy. A lot of red wine, I thought, must be consumed at the Hotel Universal.

"Will you have a drink?" Derek asked. "I don't drink a lot myself."

"You never were fond of drink," I said.

"A waste of time and money. Besides, you don't keep fit on drink. But this is an occasion." He smiled at me and ordered three glasses of beer. He spoke to the woman behind the counter and she said we could eat at once. So there was no second round of drinks and I was rather grateful, because I could hang on to my few pesos and wouldn't have to ask him so soon for money.

We sat down at one of the tables and a girl came with a dish of puchero and three plates. "Did you arrive this morning?" she asked Derek.

"No," he said. "I live here."

"Here?"

"I have an estancia twenty-five miles away."

"That's funny," she said. Then she asked us if we wanted to drink with our meal.

Derek said he never drank with his meals. "But, William, you have a drink."

"May I have a little wine?"

He asked Pedro if he wanted a drink and Pedro said he wouldn't mind a bottle of beer. Derek drank water and when I poured the wine into my glass he said, "I suppose you took to the habit in France?"

"I suppose I did."

Though I didn't want to I couldn't resist looking at his hair. It is a timeworn fact that you enjoy signs of wear and tear in others if they are younger than you and you haven't been affected the same way. Derek's hair had receded during the seven years. Mine hadn't; and here he was three years younger than I with so much less hair and the dome of a high forehead. About a dozen men came in and stood at the bar dicing for drinks. They must have

been railway officials or shopkeepers and were dressed in last year's Buenos Aires fashion. Then they came and sat down and ate puchero. Toothpicks abounded on the tables. The sun had gone, the grey sky was low and there wasn't much light in the room.

"Doesn't one get rather tired of puchero?" I asked.

"I don't know," Derek said. "I've got completely accustomed to it."

"Is your wife a good cook?"

He looked at me surprised. "My wife doesn't cook," he said. "We have a cook. Only very poor people cook out here. Or, of course, professional cooks. I have three of them on the estancia. Male cooks. They cook for the men."

"I see. How silly of me. But in France most women cook themselves." He looked at me as though he were going to say that we weren't in France. But he said nothing and later in a calm incurious voice asked,

"Did Mary cook?"

"Yes. Dominique's mother nagged the life out of her till she learnt to cook. She became a very good cook."

"Of course her mother-in-law must have been a good judge because of all those restaurants they have."

I couldn't help laughing. "In the Barlets' house the food was very different from the food in the Barlet restaurants."

Derek did not approve of my levity. "As you know I was only once in France," he said.

Our mother had brought him to France before he went up to Oxford. He was solemn and inspected Paris solemnly. We didn't hit it off well but that was already after the beginning of mutual irritation and distrust. Dominique, I think, liked him, but his mother said that he frightened her. Mme Barlet was a woman of whims and fancies.

"You and Dominique wrote to each other at times?" I asked.

"Yes," Derek said negligently. "You must give me your version of those seven years. There is so much I want to know."

I didn't care for the word version. Who else had a version? Mary was dead and her version would have been the same as mine. And Dominique, as far as I was concerned, hadn't a version. Beaten generals retire from the battlefield. "It's a long story," I said.

"Not now," he said quickly. "We have plenty of time."

Conversation was loud around us. Though they sat at different tables the men in dark suits were all scrabbling at the same subject. The subject was foreigners. They said that they disliked foreigners. I glanced at Pedro, who didn't seem interested. I turned to Derek. "Are they running us down?"

Derek looked at me with those hurt soft eyes of his. They were astonishingly hard for a second. "I don't care a damn what they say," he said. "They're the scum of the earth."

"All of them?"

"He isn't," he said. He pointed with his thumb at Pedro. "I like the men who work on the land and I like the real old gaucho. But those pale little swine whose fathers came out in immigrant ships from Italy, I have no time for them." He said that quietly, yet his voice was forceful. I admired him for that though he probably was as intolerant of them as they were of him.

The next course was steak. We ate that in silence and I wished the food wasn't so dull. Then cheese. I drank coffee; Derek didn't. "I don't like coffee," he said.

"Beef, beef, beef," I said. "It was the same in Buenos Aires."

"Why did you stay there a fortnight?" Derek asked.

"I wanted to find my sea-legs, if you get my meaning." That wasn't quite the truth.

"Buenos Aires isn't Patagonia."

Achaval came in. First he went to the bar and I said to myself now his last two pesos are going. I blushed and prayed that he wouldn't notice me. Derek would disapprove of him. At the adjoining tables the conversation hadn't flagged. They were hard at the Americans. The English would follow.

"Well, laddie," said Achaval, "so here you are. And this is your brother. Pleased to meet you, I am sure."

I didn't look at Derek. Achaval pulled up a chair and sat down. "What do you think of Zapala?" he asked.

"Rather small," I said. It sounded like a whisper.

He turned to Derek. "You hear that? Rather small." He laughed indulgently and his voice implied that he and Derek were sharing a secret. The secret being my naïveté.

"This," I said, "is Mr. Achaval. We met on the train."

"You live round here?" Derek asked.

"No, I came here to look for work."

"I see," Derek said.

Now I looked at him. His eyes said what I had expected them to say: the sort of tramp you'd pick up.

"I imagine," Derek said, "there are quite a few jobs knocking about. But more to the south. You speak good English. You ought to have stayed in Buenos Aires."

Achaval smiled. "It became too hot for me." Just as I feared.

"We must be going now," Derek said, and rose from the table. Pedro and I followed suit. But by then Achaval was on his feet. We stood there like a diagram of sorts. Pedro was short: I was tall, but not as tall as Derek who was extremely tall: Achaval, however, towered above him. He was speaking to Derek. He spoke with dignity yet like an intimate friend. He stated facts which were true and accurate; yet simultaneously he pointed out matters that appealed not only to reason but also to the heart. To cut it short, he was begging.

He told Derek that he was broke and wanted work. He told him too that dire necessity would stab him in the belly if he went much longer without a job. He needed it right now and if Derek took pity on him he would repay him with diligent and honest labour. Moreover, he wasn't averse to a monetary present. He was sensible enough, he declared, to forget his pride, which he already had pocketed. There was nothing cringing about him. I for one blushed.

And Derek listened. Leaning on his stick he listened attentively and I was careful not to catch his eye. "I am

afraid," he said, "I can't help you. There are no vacancies on the estancia."

Then Achaval spoke to him in Spanish. The clients were listening to them but they weren't interested. An everyday occurrence and it didn't matter one way or the other. Derek's Spanish was slow, his accent was heavy, but his grammar and syntax were faultless. He said no again. Achaval wouldn't take a no. Well, I thought, there were fifteen pesos left. I could give them to him if the worst came to the worst. He reverted to English and dished up his arguments a second time.

"I must go," Derek said. When speaking to Achaval he had to look up. I don't think that experience often came his way.

"I must go," he said louder. "But I tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a line to the intendente, the mayor. He's a friend of mine. He might put some work in your way."

"Couldn't you take me round to him?" Achaval asked. We were obstructing the passage and people muttered.

"All right, come with me," Derek said. As we went out he whispered to me. "I don't like him."

The mayor lived a little farther up. Achaval was walking with Derek, and Pedro and I were behind them. We arrived at the mayor's house. Derek stopped and clapped and the door opened, and a fat, comfortable looking, middle-aged woman came out. Derek asked her whether Don Martin was in. She said he was and we tripped in, but Pedro remained outside. She ushered us into an office. It was a cold room. A desk, a safe, a few rigid black chairs and the cold. On the wall was a map. We remained standing and there was no conversation. I studied the map and that was one way of not having to look at Derek. It was the map of the Provincia de Santa Fé and God only knew why it hung in the office of the mayor of Zapala. Perhaps it was there just as an ornament. I glanced back and that was the very moment that Achaval asked Derek for a cigarette. So I returned to the map.

"You smoke pretty cheap cigarettes," Achaval said. "What I like is Camels." The map was most engrossing.

I took a great liking to the township of Venado Tuerto and its environs. I heard footsteps and the door flew open, and there was Don Martin the mayor, small and square and wearing slippers. He shook Derek by the hand and Derek introduced me. He shook me by the hand too. He was of a fair complexion and had kind understanding eyes. You often see Dutchmen with such eyes.

"Don Martin," Derek said, "this man asked me for a job. There are no vacancies on the estancia, so I wondered if you could fix him up."

"A friend of yours?" Don Martin asked.

Before Derek could answer Achaval said, "I'm the son of Senator Achaval."

"Oh, you're his son," the mayor said.

"I want to work," Achaval went on. "That's why I came south."

"I need a man or two for laying down water-pipes," Don Martin said. "But I don't pay much."

"I don't care how much you pay," Achaval said. "The quicker I start the better. I have the desire to work." He used the word *gana* which is so difficult to translate.

"You can start to-morrow," Don Martin said. "Be here at seven sharp." He extended his hand which was a definite sign of dismissal and Achaval walked out. I must confess I was glad.

The mayor asked Derek how his wife was, how things were going on at the estancia, and invited both of us to drink *maté* with him. Derek declined because it was getting late. The mayor expressed his regrets and asked me if this was my first visit to the Argentine. I said yes and felt Derek's eyes on me, and added that I was enchanted with the little I had hitherto seen. The mayor promised me that my enchantment would increase every day, and we shook hands and Derek thanked him, and he saw us to the door.

We found Achaval talking to Pedro. It was an animated conversation and Pedro was enjoying himself. Achaval turned to Derek.

"Thank you," he said.

"I hope you'll get on well with Don Martin," Derek

said. "He is a fine, hard-working man." He nodded and wanted to walk back to the car. Achaval stopped him.

"Could you lend me a few pesos?" he asked. "I won't be paid till the end of the week and I must live in the meantime."

Derek took a five-peso note from his pocket and gave it to him.

"Cheerio, laddie," Achaval said to me. "See you soon."

We walked in silence to the car, but when we got in I said, "Derek, I'm sorry. It wasn't really my fault."

"You must beware of people like that. He is no good."

"I expected you to say that he's the sort of person I'd pick up."

"When I asked you to come and live with me I put all such ideas out of my mind." He spoke slowly and I thought it was better not to answer. The afternoon was dark and it was the well-informed herald of the coming dark night. The stones brooded on the roadside. We crossed the railway-line and the road turned a bit towards the mountains, and here the road was passably good. Derek accelerated and we were travelling at a fair speed. Silence sat like fog between us.

He had been a silent boy. And that was something of a contrast because nobody else had been silent in that house outside Exmouth. Mr. Edmett was a talker. He read the *Manchester Guardian* and interpreted it to us for the rest of the day. In fact he was the last edition of the *Manchester Guardian*. "Your correspondent" was his correspondent. Our mother was either happy or a little worried and she was loquacious in either mood. Nor was Mary of the silent type. But she was brilliant and witty. Most of my chatter was for Derek's benefit. I used to tell him long picaresque tales which I partly invented and chiefly derived from Captain Kettle. That was before I was sent to Paris. He would listen to me quietly and now and then asked a question. They weren't stupid questions. They were too pedantic. Often, in order to escape giving an answer, I had to biff him. The prerogative of the elder brother.

"Want a cigarette?" Derek asked.

"Yes please," I said.

"Take the packet out of my pocket. It's here."

I took the packet and said, "Achaval took the last packet I had."

"That was very weak of you."

He stopped the car and unbuttoned his overcoat and took out two packets of ten. "Here you are," he said. I thanked him.

Pedro was dozing in the back of the car. We smoked and I said to myself: the silence is coming on again. So I said, "Isn't it funny, I never asked you if you had any children?"

"I haven't," he said. "If I had both you and Mary would have known. I don't believe in children."

"You were a child, weren't you?"

"A poor argument. But I won't argue. I might give you my reasons some day." His left hand made a little gesture.

"I don't think I agree with you."

"Any more questions?" He was smiling grimly.

"No more questions," I said. "I thought that you'd like children." It was pure nervousness on my part. He didn't answer. He must have learnt that trick from his father. Mr. Edmett liked to leave questions unanswered. He was ashamed to confess that he hadn't any. But with Derek it was different. Or perhaps the same. If I came to think of it it was the same.

"I'm very much looking forward to meeting your wife," I said. I waited a little. "What is her Christian name?"

"Anatilde."

"Is that two names?"

"No, it's one word."

"A very beautiful name."

He nodded. I saw that from the corner of my eye. We drove on and silence was creeping up again. There were a few trees, but the rocky world remained unchanged.

"William," Derek said, "there is one thing I want to tell you."

I realized that he wanted to tell me that from the moment I got off the train. "What is it?"

"Anatilde knows nothing of our . . . how should I put

it? . . . complicated family relationship. You know what I mean. I don't see any reason why you should mention that in her presence. I want all that to be forgotten. You're my brother and that's the end of it."

A lorry was coming from the opposite direction and made a lot of noise. As it passed us I imagined that Derek was still talking but when the lorry and its noise had gone I realized that he had finished. "As you like," I said.

"You will do me a great favour by not referring to those subjects."

"There is only one."

"And its consequences."

"As you like," I said for the second time.

"It wouldn't be fair to Father's memory."

"I don't see why."

"I don't want to argue. All I ask you, William, is that you should refer to the man who adopted you and paid for your education as your father."

"You have a forceful way of stating your case." I looked at him and waited. He was biting his lips. He was hurt and angry.

"I'm asking a favour," he said.

"I'll tell your wife that you're my brother. Not my half-brother. As a matter of fact I won't raise the subject at all."

"Thank you."

I wanted to change the topic. "Does your wife speak English?"

"No," he said. "There is no reason why she should."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I don't want to uproot her. It's a matter of principle with me." There were many obvious answers. But it was his business and his wife's business.

"I understand you learnt to speak Spanish," he said.

"Yes. I fell in love with the language. And I fell in love with Spain too. Mary and I went there for three weeks two years ago."

"I know. You sent me a post card from Aranjuez."

I was suddenly ashamed of myself. A post card! A crumb off the hotel writing-desk. And he remembered it

and probably it was tucked away among his souvenirs. "It was nice in Spain," I said, but because the post card was still with me I said, "I'm very glad to see you again, Derek."

"So am I." He said that very endearingly.

"I wonder," I said shortly after, "what your house is like?"

"It was Uncle Charles who built it. It's quite comfortable."

"A house in Patagonia."

"Yes," Derek said and smiled at me.

The landscape was changing. A deep ravine and a primitive bridge across it. Tufts of grass among the stones and then suddenly near to the road a flock of sheep. It was the largest flock I had ever seen. There must have been thousands and thousands.

"Are those yours?" I asked.

"No," he said, "they belong to a neighbour of mine; he's a German. He's an excellent neighbour to have. A nice man, too. We'll go and see him some day. One has very few neighbours round here."

"I'm not looking forward to meeting him," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't like Germans."

"That's narrow minded."

"I know. But I went to a French school and I never learnt to forget and forgive."

He left that unanswered.

"Do you remember, Derek, there was a time when we thought that my father was a brave nobleman and had been killed in the war?"

He left that unanswered too.

"And do you remember when Mary and I had that utterly ridiculous notion that our father was a Swede?"

"Like Queen Victoria I am not amused."

"We, to be precise. Sorry." The sheep seemed like a sea of wool. "Merino?" That was just a guess.

"Yes, Merino. Mine are Merino too."

A solitary horseman was jogtrotting before us. In order not to frighten his horse Derek slowed down and gave horse and horseman a wide berth. The man wore all the accoutre-

ments of a gaucho. He was an imposing figure under the lowering sky.

It had tickled our childish imagination to think that our father had been a Swede. Considering everything it would have been the most unlikely thing for our mother to fall in love with a Swede. But we had never met a Swede and with the perversity of our youthful minds we thought that idea was funny and, God knows why, strictly disrespectful. Not that we didn't love our mother. Quite the contrary: we were devoted to her: she was a good mother. Prudish and loving. Notwithstanding Mary's and my origin she was a paragon of virtue and a product of the wealthy industrial outlook on life. Not that she could abide factory chimneys. Nobody wanted her to. Taking her character and outlook on life duly into consideration it seemed to me from the very beginning that my nebulous father must have been a most extraordinary person. She had all our respect.

"Here we are," Derek said.

We were off the road and bumping along a stony track. There were many more trees. Pines and below the escarpment elms; and the distant insinuating sound of rushing water was with us. We came to a gate and Pedro got out and opened it and shouted something, and then he didn't get back into the car but walked away. There were stones and grass and a few head of cattle. Then another gate. I jumped out and opened it and as I saw the house before me I didn't get back into the car: I walked slowly towards the house, but first lit a cigarette. There was one loose in my pocket. Plenty of small huts were around the house. You had to peel them off, so to speak, to get a view of it. And the first view I had immediately confirmed my fears. Uncle Charles had built a second-rate Victorian homestead in Patagonia. A South of England vicarage with a couple of bay windows and a porch: and the whole thing was repellant yet moving, because it was such a stranger in the thick of those alien surroundings.

There wasn't much of a garden though an attempt must have been made at a lawn, but nature had refused to be friendly to it. It wasn't a large house, but it had two stories which

seemed incongruous and unnecessary when one had the whole of Patagonia to build the house on. Derek opened the door for me. He had left the car at exactly the same time as I and with his long strides had reached the door half a second before me. We were in the hall and the staircase was on the right. The hall was stone flagged and there was no fireplace, and it was ice cold. The stairs were wooden stairs and they vaguely reminded me of the stairs of a Swiss chalet.

"Put your coat on a hanger," Derek said.

Behind the staircase there was a hat-rack and coats hung there, and I was surprised there weren't any golf-clubs. I hung my overcoat on a hanger.

Derek watched me. He stood in the middle of the stone-flagged floor with the wooden staircase behind him. He was leaning on his stick. He is a Pre-Raphaelite figure, I said to myself. But I added that since I knew very little of pre-Raphaelite figures it was rather presumptuous to call him a Pre-Raphaelite figure.

"Come into the sitting-room," he said.

He opened the door facing the staircase and I entered a room that shouldn't have been more than four hours from Waterloo. There was a large fireplace with logs burning in it. On the mantelpiece an assortment of pewter tankards caught the edge of the glow. Five tankards in all. A settee faced the fireplace and on each side of the settee, facing each other, were two deep armchairs. They appeared to possess the combined comfort of Heal's and Maple's. The settee was covered with a red material and the armchairs sported flowery chintzes, the dominant hue being cream. The curtains were of the same material as the armchair chintzes. But what surprised me most was a bulldog sleeping in front of the fireplace. An old brindle bulldog, and it didn't take me long to recognize him. It was David.

"It isn't David?" I asked.

"It is David," Derek said. David stretched himself, yawned and on old wobbly legs came up to us. His eyes were bloodshot.

Mr. Edmett bred bulldogs, though not in a scientific way

as that would have meant too much trouble. Often enough his bitches produced queer-looking puppies and Mr. Edmett would remonstrate with them, and because he was a kind-hearted man refused to drown the puppies and they stayed on till he could find them a home. His chief reason for going in for bulldogs was that he attributed to bulldogs all the qualities he himself didn't possess. Fierceness, courage and a certain amount of imposing cruelty. But since bulldogs had degenerated so much on account of inbreeding, his dogs were really slophounds, and Mr. Edmett would have been surprised if he had known how much he had in common with his dogs; and it would have chagrined him a lot. And now here was David, Derek's puppy of bygone days.

"I didn't know you brought him out with you," I said.

"Well, we weren't very keen on details in our letters." He looked round and said, "Sorry, I should have asked you if you wanted to wash your hands."

I said I didn't want to wash my hands. We sat down and David lay down beside Derek.

"He isn't having a very good time here," Derek said. "He must keep inside the garden because the savage sheep-dogs of the men would kill him if he went out."

I had to summon up all my self-control to refrain from bursting into laughter. Poor Mr. Edmett's warrior breed penned up in the lawnless garden on account of lowly mongrels wishing to fight him and obliterate him.

"Poor David," I said in an even voice. But where was Derek's wife?

"I like this place," I lied.

"It doesn't make one feel so very much a stranger," Derek said.

"You don't ever feel a stranger?" I asked.

"I don't." He leaned forward and his hurt brown eyes were steady. "I built up this life and it is my own life and because it's mine I want to keep it and live it."

The door opened and Anatilde came in.

THREE

The first thing I noticed were her eyes. They were green. Green eyes are considered to be angry eyes, even treacherous. But Anatilde's eyes were different. If you walk on a summer day along a Belgian dune and suddenly come up against the sea with a steady wind blowing and the sun shining, then you see the sea as green as Anatilde's eyes. They were depthless like the sea and they had the strength and serenity of the sea. And like the sea they promised a lot down in the deep. And they were like the sea. Always a little wind and the green colour was produced by the sun surrounded by light clouds. She had black hair and a straight nose and her lips were fresh. There are lips that are born young and there are lips that belong to old age. Her lips would never age. Her figure was far from perfect. Her hips were too large, but that suited her. She had nice hands with long slightly crooked fingers. She was of medium height and her shoulders were straight. She wore a simple woollen dress and a gold bracelet on her left wrist. I didn't think much of that gold bracelet. She had small straight feet and her shoes didn't do them justice. Her hair was brushed back and her forehead was white and smooth. Her body must be like that too.

We both stood up. Derek stood like a familiar landmark. I remembered that he had stood up exactly like that whenever our mother came into the room. I looked quickly at him.

"This is my brother," he said.

She smiled and we shook hands and for the life of me I didn't know what to say. For she was exactly as Mary and I had imagined her. But those eyes showed me that we had both been wrong. We must have misjudged Derek: in order to marry a woman with those green eyes one must be an important person. Not that we had ever thought that Derek

wasn't important in his own sphere. But green eyes seemed to have nothing to do with his own sphere. The bigger fools we, I said to myself.

She asked me if I'd had a pleasant journey and I said yes, I had a pleasant journey. Then Derek asked me if I wanted tea and I said yes, I should like some tea. Then Derek asked if there was any news for him and she said that the capataz had looked in a little while ago and wanted to speak to him.

"He shouldn't have disturbed you," Derek said; and his wife didn't appear to appreciate his solicitude. He got up and said he would go and find the capataz. David got up and went with him to the door and there changed his mind and came back and lay at Anatilde's feet. From the door Derek said that we shouldn't wait for him with tea and Anatilde smiled and said she would order tea for the señor. So she was referring to her brother-in-law as señor. Derek left and she rang the bell and a fat slovenly creature with a lot of black hair came in, and Anatilde told her to bring tea. The maid mumbled something—her eyes took me in with a half-impudent half-curious look—and went out. I took a packet of cigarettes Derek had given me and offered Anatilde one. She smiled and said no señor she didn't smoke. I think she thought it was odd of me to have offered her a cigarette.

"May I smoke?" I asked.

"Of course, señor," she said. "Why ask me?"

"It's a habit."

"A habit?"

"Yes, a habit." So I lit my cigarette. She was sitting on the settee. She was sitting straight up and it would never have occurred to her to cross her legs. She wore silk stockings and because her ankles were slim I regretted again her taste in shoes. She looked so much like a woman who should have children that I could hardly restrain myself from asking her why she hadn't any. Surely Derek's explanation wasn't enough. She wetted her lips with her tongue. That was like watering flowers.

"You travelled through Bahia Blanca, didn't you, señor?"

"Yes, I travelled through Bahia Blanca. I changed there."

"How long did you stay there?"

"One day."

She spoke slowly: probably Derek had warned her that my Spanish might be poor. Anyway, the effect of questions and answers was somehow naïve. Though her questions weren't void of charm. Her voice faintly reminded me of the drumming of snipe. Absurd; but it made me think of snipe.

"Only one day," she said, and seemed sorry for me.

"Yes, only one day," I repeated.

Now her voice was like the heat of the logs in the fireplace. "You missed a lot," she said. "Bahia Blanca is a fine town." There are many things one could say about Bahia Blanca. During my short stay I said most of them. The word fine hadn't been among them.

"I come from Bahia Blanca, señor," she said.

Bahia Blanca was beside the sea, but the South Atlantic was grey and not green. She shouldn't have been born in Bahia Blanca.

"Please don't call me señor," I said. "I am your brother-in-law."

"Yes, señor," she said. "What is your Christian name?"

That was like Derek. Not to mention my Christian name. My brother he would say; and he wouldn't condescend to impart further information. "William," I said.

"Willi-am," she repeated. She hadn't heard that word before.

It was soothing and fresh as she said William. "Willi-am."

"It's Guillerme in Spanish," I said.

(One never says Español out there: one says Castellano.)

"Ah, Guillerme," she said, but she repeated, "Willi-am. That is very interesting."

The maid came in with the tea-tray. She dumped it on a small table. She withdrew leaving a whiff of garlic and of unwashed humanity behind. I waited for Anatilde to pour out the tea; she did nothing of the sort. I had finished my cigarette and threw the end into the fire. There weren't

any ashtrays about. There was the teapot, hot water, milk and several slices of lemon and she made no attempt to pour the tea out. Eventually she said:

"Won't you pour the tea out?" And she added, "Willi-am?"

She appeared pleased with my name. "I'm so sorry," I said, "but I . . ." She didn't give me a chance to finish my sentence.

"In Europe do women pour out the tea?"

"Didn't you know?" I asked.

"No." She shook her head. Gently: like a young tree in the Spring: the breeze is light. "My husband always pours out the tea himself. He knows our Criollo customs."

"In England and France women pour out the tea."

"How extraordinary. Like servants."

"But in Europe women don't sit behind bars."

"Bars?" She shook her head again. I realized that I had mentioned number forty to a child that had learnt to count only to ten. "Do you want me to pour it out for you?" she asked.

"Oh, no," I said and poured out the tea. She didn't take milk but she made me put two slices of lemon in her cup. We drank our tea and there was no further talk. David was snoring, and there was utter silence around us. Now I well believed that I was far from the world in which I was born, brought up and had intended to live. Probably down to Tierra del Fuego that silence prevailed. Anatlilde made no effort to break it. In that silence stretched from beginning to end curious thoughts came to me. They came first one by one and then they came in shoals and they were like the flying fish of the South Atlantic. They were noisy rattling thoughts and I glanced at her furtively, afraid lest she might hear them. I didn't want her to hear them. She would have heard their noise but not understood their meaning. Then they went. Abruptly; and the whole lot of them. Only the silence remained and David's snores accentuated it. It was soothing like that. David stretched, turned over and he stopped snoring. We were alone with silence in which we both participated. I looked at her and saw that she must

have been looking at me for some time. There was a faint little frown between her eyebrows.

"I was trying to find a resemblance between you and my husband, señor," she said.

"William," I begged.

"Yes, Willi-am. But there is no resemblance."

That was true, for Derek looked like Mr. Edmett. The resemblance, however, was only on the surface. Within himself Derek was an altogether different proposition. Mr. Edmett had spent an inactive life. A man who was born around 1870 and the son of well-to-do parents could easily go through life without having to toil and slog. Provided, of course, he died before the twenties were out. Mr. Edmett chose the easy path and kept to it so carefully that he died five years before his time-limit. That came of keeping to the safe side. True, he had loved our mother and had been a good father and an exemplary stepfather. In fact he hadn't been much of a stepfather, for he had treated Mary and me like his own children. And he bred bulldogs. But apart from that he never did a stroke of work. He had shares in well-established old-fashioned companies. Those companies were like elegant ruins. There was a little less of them every year. Like some ruins they refused to be restored and honestly and proudly they marched towards decay.

Every year before the general meetings of those companies Mr. Edmett decided to go to London and be present at the meetings. Invariably he left it at that, though he read the reports and disagreed with them and proclaimed that next year he would go up to town. But once he did write a letter to *The Times* on taxation. That was before 1914. He didn't approve of direct taxation. *The Times* published his letter and a copy was deposited in the top drawer of his writing-desk. "Considering," Mr. Edmett told me one day, "that I don't take in *The Times* I think it was very handsome of them." All the energy which had skipped Mr. Edmett came to roost on Derek's straight shoulders. He had been possessed by love of work and activity from the very start. For me who had been devoted to the father and was brother of the son there was somehow nothing sur-

prising about it. You can deal with extremes quite easily.

"You come from France?" Anatilde asked.

"No," I said. "I come from England."

"You lived in France, my husband tells me."

"Yes, I lived in France, but before coming out here I spent two months in England."

"England is very near to France, isn't it?" she asked timidly.

"Haven't you been to Europe?"

My question astonished her. She smiled. Her teeth were perfect and they seemed to have a beauty and a life of their own.

"No, I don't know Europe," she said. "I have lived all my life in Bahia Blanca. When my husband married me I came here. I am very fond of Bahia Blanca."

What, I wondered, could anybody like about Bahia Blanca? It was a dismal sordid town that had come into being because it was on the right site for the export of wool and cereals. It had no personality and there was nothing permanent about it. The roads were bad. Holes and ruts in the streets. A taxi driver had explained to me that there had been some municipal scandal owing to the pinching of money which should have been spent on road building. That, he said, had happened a long time ago, but notwithstanding the scandal the roads remained as bad as before. The houses, as always in the Argentine, were a dreary mixture. A low dilapidated house beside a glaringly modern building and then a tin shanty on the other side. The young bloods drove about the main thoroughfares in the afternoon; there was no good restaurant anywhere and the brothels smacked even more of white slave traffic than in Buenos Aires. One day was ample to find that out. Then cinemas and stores and an eating house with cerveza Hamburguesa.

"I am very attached to Bahia Blanca," Anatilde said. "I am sure that European towns aren't lovelier."

I thought for a moment of Paris, Seville and Florence and I ought to have been furious with her narrow-mindedness. But the effect was the contrary. I was moved and rather

respected her for loving that hideous town, though it seemed to me that Derek might have gone to the expense of getting hold of a photograph, let's say, of the Place de la Concorde or Bedford Square.

"I understand," she said, "that Paris is a very fine town in its own way. I think at school we had pictures of that church in which Napoleon I is buried. A long time ago, perhaps in my grandfather's time, I had relatives in Madrid." She laughed. "But that must have been fifty or sixty years ago, and who will believe things that happened then."

"Madrid is a fine town," I said. "So you're of Spanish origin?"

"Spanish?" she said. "I am a Criolla." Which really meant that she was a native of the Argentine and wasn't interested in anything else. David stopped snoring and I heard Derek's footsteps in the hall. The door opened and he came in.

"You will excuse me," he said to Anatilde, "but Don Francisco had some business to transact with me."

She nodded. It was a short nod. Derek helped himself to tea and David reached the conclusion that he needed affection. Derek lifted the heavy old dog and put him on his knee. Concentrated snores soon followed.

"He is a good old dog," Derek said. He spoke in Spanish but his words were not addressed to his wife. Once he looked at her and gave her a bright smile. He spoke of farm matters to me and then of Argentine political matters. They seemed to be complicated and Derek didn't think much of the politicians. His sentences, like his arguments, were neat and watertight. "There are many political parties in France, I gather," he said.

"Plenty," I said. He smiled brightly at his wife. "Plenty," I repeated and I thought of Dominique and his political ambitions. A few years ago in my presence he informed his mother that he wished to join one of the parties. I can't remember which party it was. Mme Barlet ticked him off. "You are pretentious," she said. "First put your life in order. If you find one day that everything in your life and in your home is well organized then you'll have

the right to speak of politics. But before that takes place dabbling with other people's affairs is sheer impertinence."

As we sat there the thought came to me: what would Dominique think of Anatilde? Dominique considered himself an expert on women. He often said that when he decided to marry Mary he pictured her in the middle of a beauty parade. Hundreds of good-looking women on the left and just as many on the right. He measured up all their physical qualities and found them wanting as compared to Mary. So he chose Mary. Dominique had a lot of dark fair hair and a thin sensitive face and he laughed as he said that. In the beginning Mary felt flattered; later on it annoyed her. Nevertheless Dominique didn't tire of telling his little story again and again. I looked up and Anatilde was sitting with both hands on her knees. Dominique, I decided, would have found fault with her. With a lot of eloquence and not without wit he would have discoursed on her figure and there would have been little left of Anatilde at the end of his speech. Still, she seemed whole, soft and complete as she sat there with her hands on her knees. I had glanced at Dominique's face during Mary's funeral. He was staring hard at the gorgeous Swiss. He wasn't looking at the coffin. Though mine was but a short glance yet his features didn't strike me as the features of a keen judge of women. Just a miserable unhappy man. There were no hundred good-looking women on the left and there were no hundred good-looking women on the right. Only the mourners.

"I'm going to show you to your room," Derek said.

"I rose and we went into the ice-cold hall, where now a couple of electric bulbs were spreading gloom across the stone-flagged floor. He took me upstairs. There was a corridor running from one end of the house to the other. It was a narrow corridor with one lone light in the middle. Four dark doors were picked out by the naked light. Two on each side.

"Here is your room," Derek said.

The room he took me into had nothing Victorian about it. It was like a room in a respectable but third-rate hotel; and

that hotel could have been in any of the cold corners of the globe. An iron bed, a table, a chest of drawers, but the drawers had gone the way of old drawers and a green curtain hung there in lieu of them. Beside the chest was a cupboard, the kind of cupboard you find in nurseries. An old-fashioned electric radiator sulked beside the table. The table was covered with a white table-cloth. I must get rid of that table-cloth, I thought.

The cold was coming in through the closed window. It was already night outside. My luggage stood beside the window. It had an expectant air. A very impermanent room that was.

"This room," Derek said, "used to be Mackenzie's room."

"Who was Mackenzie?" I asked.

"He was Uncle Charles's manager. He ran the whole show. I found him here when I took over." He stood near the window and was staring hard at the luggage. "You couldn't realize what an uphill fight I had," he went on. "He had run the estancia and when I arrived he intended to run me. He'd been out here twenty-five years. I was a newcomer, so I knew nothing. He told me that every day. I was a prisoner on my own land. But not for long. I stood him for a year and then I sacked him. That first year, William, was pure hell."

I nodded because I could see it so clearly. The dour old Scotsman, rough and stubborn, and a silent Derek with clenched fists trying to make his own way. Uphill? Yes, I could see Derek climbing that hill. "Was he a good farm manager?" I asked.

Derek's eyes left the luggage and they focused on me. "During the war everything fetched high prices, so Uncle Charles was satisfied. High prices continued for some time after the war and I came just when the slump started. When things go badly that's when real knowledge and skill come to the top. The slump proved he was no good."

"Where did you learn farming?" I asked. There was very little I knew of the last seven years of his life; and in a sense I was ashamed to show my ignorance of and consequently

lack of interest in his movements for more than half a decade. None the less I couldn't resist asking that question.

"I spent a year on a sheep estancia in Chubut," he said. "And I worked hard. A farmer must work hard and must know his job inside out. Between you and me Uncle Charles wasn't much of a farmer. You know the sort of thing. If you're a gentleman you understand farming. A lot of rubbish." He moved to the door. "I'm still learning." He opened the door. "When you've had a wash come down. We eat at seven in winter. The bathroom door faces yours. Our bedroom is next door to you."

He went out and my hands were like ice. I found the switch of the radiator. The radiator wouldn't give much heat. I went to the window and looked out. There wasn't much to see. The clouds had gone and the stars were appearing, first one by one and then they were all there. The stars reminded me of the night before and I looked down on myself of the night before because such a lot had happened to me since then. Not that those happenings could have been put into words or rationally explained. I couldn't make out the landscape as it was shrouded in darkness, but a few hundred yards away I discerned the outlines of a hill. I rather felt than saw that. Since I hadn't seen it when we drove up I presumed that my room must be on the other side of the house. I left the window and started to unpack.

It was all in a mess. I found my riding-boots and they looked too smart for Patagonia. There was all sorts of stuff I wouldn't need and I had brought it along because I had nowhere to dump it. I'd had to think pretty hard when the immigration officer in Buenos Aires asked me for my permanent address. Eventually I gave my late address in Paris : in the rue Paul Baudry where I lived when Mary was alive and I was working for Dominique. Between a couple of dress-shirts I found Mary's photograph. The silver frame was dirty and looked as if it had spent a long time under the sea. With my pocket handkerchief I tried to clean it and of course that didn't help, so I took the cloth off the table and put the photograph there.

That photograph had been taken two years before Mary's death. The photographer, much sought after and fashionable, must have been a great admirer of the Greta Garbo of silent picture days. Thus Mary appeared like a femme fatale on the photograph, and that was a complete misconception of Mary. For her dealings with fate had been of a passive nature. I finished unpacking and lit a cigarette, and while I lit it I looked at the picture. "Au chevalier sans peur et sans reproche," the inscription said. It had been written during one of her heroic moods, but when I had the photograph framed after her death I was a bit ashamed of those high-faluting finishing-school words and now the frame hid them. In spite of the Garbo attitude there was utter pathos in her eyes. You always felt sorry for Mary on account of her eyes and after her death everybody said that with those eyes she was bound to die young. French people admire the early departed. In France you don't find that pride and self-satisfaction which age inspires in many other countries. Therefore Mary's eyes were paid a fine compliment when her friends and acquaintances declared that her eyes were the eyes of the quick and the dead. A posthumous compliment. I went to the bathroom to wash my hands.

The bathroom was narrow and cold and the bathtub was spotlessly clean. On a shelf there were first aid appliances. There was a second shelf which displayed two brushes and two combs. I looked round but found no bottles of scent or eau-de-Cologne, no jars of cream, no powder. Yet a woman lived in the house and this was the only bathroom. There were two tooth-brushes in a glass. One was white and the other green. I picked up a piece of soap and it wasn't scented soap. Already in his childhood Derek had given signs of not being fond of luxury, though he liked his simple comfort. Now so far from his original background and living in an austere cold land, I supposed, the sense of luxury had left him completely. But what about his wife? Surely Argentine women liked that sort of thing. In Buenos Aires, and previously in Paris, I had seen quite a lot of them and they were lavishly made up and you could smell them agreeably from a distance. They seemed to be walking

containers of scent. Not one of them would have had such a bathroom. Of that I was certain.

Was it, I asked myself, Derek who had impressed his personality and idiosyncrasies on her? That wouldn't have been fair. And as I said that I thought of Dominique who would come home rapturously with a new bottle of scent. "Look, Mary, what I discovered for you." Or when they went out in the evening like a dog he would sniff her and say that she hadn't used enough scent. He was a lipstick expert too. I went out of the bathroom, put out the light in my room and went downstairs. One of the two bulbs had been switched off in the hall.

Derek was sitting in an armchair, reading a book. It was an enormous book. Anatilde sat quietly, one hand resting in her lap and the other loose beside her. She wasn't reading, or even thinking. I was somehow certain of that. She looked up as I came in and gave me a smile, but her green eyes weren't looking at me. They were focused on something behind me. I don't know what it was or what it could have been. But whatever it was it was just behind me.

Then Derek said, "I think we should eat." He said that in Spanish, and she rang the bell and the slovenly creature came in and he asked if dinner was ready and she said it was, and we went into the dining-room which was small and narrow but a fire was burning. We started with soup which was non-committal soup, puchero followed and then a steak. It was identically the same meal as the one we'd had at the Hotel Universal at Zapala. Do they live on meat and nothing but meat I asked myself. Derek ate sparingly. That surprised me, for he had been a voracious child.

Anatilde had nice table manners. I was certain she had learnt them from Derek. It was curious to watch an almost complete stranger eating in the way Mlle Delorme had taught us to eat more than twenty years ago; and it was edifying that out of his large European kitbag Derek had unpacked for her benefit only his table manners. Edifying but not amusing.

She spoke to me once during dinner: "How long did it take you to travel from England to Buenos Aires?"

"Seventeen days," I said.

She nodded and I wouldn't have been surprised if she had thanked me for the information. There was genuine fundamental politeness about her. And she seemed to be grateful all the time. Grateful to her Creator because she was alive, and I thought that with such beautiful eyes one couldn't but be grateful. When I passed her the bread she said thank you and I felt her gratitude. A few bananas and the meal was over. They both drank water and since I wasn't asked I didn't volunteer the information that I preferred wine to water.

Anatilde got up and Derek went and opened the door for her. He closed it and came back and I felt a little lonely and cheated because she had left us.

"There is some brandy here," he said and took a bottle out of the sideboard. "I think it's French." He put the bottle on the table and asked me if I knew the brand. I didn't. When I tasted it it was like raw spirits. Pure muck. "It's nice," Derek said and took a sip.

"Very nice," I said. He offered me a cigarette and then I said,

"I think your wife is very charming."

"I am happy with her."

"I'm glad to hear that. High time that somebody should be happy in our family." I knew he didn't like that.

"Well," he said, "Father and Mother were very happy."

That was true. Our mother was born happy. Though she fussed and her world was overrun by mice turned into elephants, she was a cheerful, contented woman. Mr. Edmett loved her simply, completely and unselfishly. To love her was his job in life. He discharged his job conscientiously and it filled his day. If less fortunate financially he would have given that devotion to his ledger in the office or to the tools in the workshop. But there being no need for other sort of work, it all went to our mother. "Because," Derek said, "you and Mary were unhappy there is no need to think there is a curse on us."

"If I come to think of it it looks to me as if there were one. Of course I'm only speaking for myself."

"Curses don't exist. You're talking childishly. But don't let us go into that."

I nodded. We could so easily have had a row right then that I was delighted to leave it at that. He poured me out another drink.

"Tell me more about your wife," I said.

"I told you she makes me happy."

"Her background. You know what I mean."

"Her father is a business man in Bahia Blanca. He's a partner in a firm of wool merchants. A very small firm. I met him on business and as is rather rare with the Argentines, he took me once to his house and there I met Anatile. They are simple, provincial people." He said that last sentence defiantly.

"I suppose simple people here are nicer than the rich and flashy ones."

"I know nothing about the rich and flashy ones. I never was socially inclined. You know that."

I knew that. He had been a shy, retiring boy and hadn't been happy at school and that had made him even more self-contained and distant.

"Now and then," Derek said, "I have to go to Bahia Blanca and Buenos Aires on business. I hate it. It's very tiring and difficult to get on with the Argentines. Mind you, the peons and the gauchos are all right. I feel completely at home with them." He looked at his glass and then he asked, "How did you get on with the French?"

"I love them," I said. "They're so lovable."

"You didn't feel a stranger among them? Their customs and habits, weren't they strange and ununderstandable to you?"

"No," I said, and I thought a little and said, "You see you only feel that difference of customs and habits when you're out of the country and look back on it. England is conspicuously England when you're in France but when you're at home it's just your workaday surroundings. You're just there. Well, it's the same the other way round. This moment Paris is the town of the Sacré Coeur and the Eiffel Tower, but when I'm in Paris I never think of the Eiffel

Tower, for when I'm there the Eiffel Tower is just as much part and parcel of the town as I the resident."

He listened attentively. "Well," he said, "you may be right, but you'll never feel that here. You know from morning till evening that this is the Argentine and you're not one of them. Personally, I'm glad that I'm not."

"Then why do you live here? You could sell the estancia and go away."

"I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing. This estancia is my job in life. One shouldn't shirk one's job. Besides, this life is the ideal life for me. Frankly, William, I couldn't picture myself anywhere else."

"And that feeling of being a stranger, doesn't it enter into your relationship with your wife?"

He looked at me surprised. "It doesn't," he said.

No, I thought, it didn't. For she was above frontiers. There are such women and they needn't discard their racial characteristics. They don't belong to one specified town or country. They belong to every country and every town because their racial characteristics are those of the entire human race. But it was funny to have such thoughts of a woman I had met only a few hours ago.

"I wouldn't let it," Derek said.

"I see," I said and my voice sounded disappointed. But he didn't notice that. "Did Mary's death upset you very much?" Having run away from the Scylla of his wife I had plunged straight into the Charybdis of Mary. I emptied my glass.

"I was very upset," he said. "I couldn't believe it." He shook his head. "I hate to sound stupid but I can tell you candidly that I'm never going to believe it. Do you know that if I went into that next room and found her sitting there I wouldn't be surprised."

The very idea of finding a living Mary at a few yards distance made me feel that heavy stone-like pain again. It left me seldom but when it came back it always came back acutely. Now it was back.

"Of course," Derek said, "to imagine a dead person in the next room is sheer nonsense." His voice was repentant.

"She didn't suffer," I said. That was reality and I hoped he would appreciate it.

"No, she didn't," he said. "We'll talk of all that at some other time. We go to bed very early here. We breakfast down here at seven-thirty; in summer at six-thirty." He left his drink unfinished and we went out. He opened the door of the sitting-room and Anatilde wasn't there. "My wife usually goes up after dinner," he said.

He picked up his book and I glanced at it. It was the same ponderous tome. "Schopenhauer," I said with awe.

"You don't read philosophy?" he asked.

"No. I read a little of Montaigne and Descartes but that's all."

"I don't think much of the French philosophers. They're dilettanti. But I must say that Schopenhauer and Hegel are very satisfactory."

"Satisfactory? I thought they're crashing bad-tempered bores. All I know about Schopenhauer is that he didn't like English officers because they always spoke of women and horses. Why shouldn't one speak of women and horses?"

Derek smiled. "My dear William," he said, "I don't want to argue with you about matters of which you yourself confess to be totally ignorant. Leave it at that. Herr von Tuercke, my neighbour, did me a great service when he drew my attention to those great thinkers."

"Please, Derek, don't be so pompous." I laughed and he smiled and then he said, "It's a pity that . . ."

"No, it isn't a pity," I said.

"All right, all right. I'm going up now." He went to the door and stood there irresolute, evidently wishing to say something and I instinctively knew that whatever he wished to say would have nothing to do with Schopenhauer. "By the way," he began, "it would be better if we cleared up a few points. We, my wife and I, are people of settled habits and I'm afraid you'll have to abide by them. I know that you led an entirely different life in Paris but this isn't Paris. Not by a long chalk."

"I know this isn't Paris. I'm your employee." I said that in order to make things easier for him. "I don't intend to interfere with my boss's way of living."

"You needn't have put it so crudely."

"Don't you bother about me, Derek. I won't upset your routine."

He gave me a grateful look but he hadn't yet finished. "You don't feel bitter about it?" he asked.

"Bitter about what?"

"To be employed by your brother who is younger than you."

I burst out laughing. I couldn't help it. "But my dear Derek," I said, "I have no jealousy. To be accurate: I have nothing. I have no desires, no ambition, nothing. I'm infinitely grateful to you for having asked me to come and work for you and that is all."

"It's a pity that you feel like that," he said. "One must have ambition."

I wanted to retort that the object of my ambition lay six feet below the ground in Paris. But to put such a sentiment into words would have been cheap and theatrical.

"Yes, it's a pity," I said.

"I used to think that you'd go a long way in life, that you'd do something really fine and that you'd be a great man."

"When I was ten years old you told me that I'd be a prime minister." I smiled and he smiled too. We stood there smiling sheepishly.

"Good night," he said suddenly.

"Good night, Derek."

"See you at breakfast."

"Rather."

He waited for me to go out through the door. I went upstairs and there was a light under their door. I wondered idly what she could be doing so early in her bedroom. I entered my room, switched on the light and I was back in the dumps. If there had been a spare hook in the room I'd have hung my panache on it. Now what, I asked myself, was I going to do till the morning? It was barely

half-past eight. I walked to the window and tried to look out but the electric radiator had done its work in my absence and the window was moist and just a blurr. I pulled the curtain and sat down on the bed. Barely half-past eight.

In Paris one was getting ready for dinner. A long civilized dinner and a civilized evening after it. The Barlets used to dine at eight. The dining-room was in bad taste and the furniture was heavy. Dominique's mother sat at the top of the table with Mary on her right and Dominique on her left. Whenever I came to dinner I sat facing Mme Barlet. She was a grand grim character and full of energy. She used it discriminatigly but it was always present. She virtually was the head of the Barlet restaurants. She was shrewd, excitable, friendly and a tower of strength. She had a large red face and though she was near fifty her hair was black without even a streak of grey. It would remain black and age wouldn't dare to attack it. Probably it knew better. For you could not play pranks on Mme Barlet. She didn't like claret but she was fond of Burgundy.

When Mary died so suddenly she didn't lose her head. After I had torn out of the house never to return to it, Mme Barlet was already out fixing up arrangements for the funeral. Neither Dominique nor I were in a state to think of such matters. I rushed home to my little flat in the rue Paul Baudry and about an hour later the bell rang. I went and opened the door and there was Mme Barlet with my hat in her hand and my overcoat on her arm.

"You left these behind," she said. "You'll catch a bad cold if you go about without an overcoat. We don't want two funerals, do we?"

"I wish to God I were dead too. There is nothing I should like better than a double funeral."

"One shouldn't speak like that," she said. "Your poor sister wouldn't like that."

"Oh yes, she would. I bet you that she's disappointed in me because I haven't the guts to follow her. I don't know where she is. Maybe it's cold there, maybe she's frightened, maybe she doesn't know what to do about being

dead and here I am and I do nothing to help her. Thank you for bringing back my coat and hat."

She didn't speak. She walked about the flat and pushed the easy chair nearer to the window. She was a great one at arranging furniture.

"Why did she die?" I asked, and of course that was a silly question. Mme Barlet didn't consider that worthy of an answer, "I'm not going back to the office."

"I think that's wise of you," she said.

"And I'm not going to the funeral."

"You must go to the funeral. It's unheard of that one should desist from going to one's sister's funeral."

"I never want to see Dominique again. I'd see him at the funeral."

"Don't look at him at the funeral. Look at your sister's coffin."

She walked to a framed Raoul Dufy drawing and straightened it.

"Pictures that aren't straight always make me fidgety," she said. She stared hard at the window and I regretted that the window-cleaner hadn't called for some time. "What are you going to do after the funeral?" she asked.

"I'm going back to England," I said.

She nodded. "And what will you do in England?"

I didn't know. "Perhaps I'll go to Patagonia to my brother. But I don't know."

"Patagonia? That's very far."

She sat down and began to weep. "Ma pauvre petite Marie," she said between sobs. I stood there with my hands hanging at my side and I watched her with detachment. She cried proudly. There was nothing humble about her tears. My detachment suddenly went.

"Come here my child," she said, "and comfort me."

I approached her and put my arms round her large heaving shoulders. We stayed like that for a while and I wished I could cry, too. I wouldn't have been ashamed to cry in front of her. But no tears came. Later she took a handkerchief from her bag. It was black-edged. Quick work;

though probably she didn't have to buy it. It must have been one of the handkerchiefs she had used when her husband died. But I was touched because she had thought of black-edged handkerchiefs so quickly. She wiped her tears and decided that there were more important matters to attend to than tears.

"I loved your sister," she said and got up. "I went to look at her again. That little frown has gone. That is a great consolation." There had been a perplexed little frown on Mary's forehead when she died. "Yes, it's gone," Mme Barlet went on. "She looks sweet and beautiful and I know that the good God will take much pride in her when she arrives up there looking so sweet and beautiful." As she said that I knew I was going to cry. But the tears didn't come. "I will talk to the chief cashier," she said. "Your salary will be sent to you. You won't have to go again to the office." I thanked her again for bringing back my coat and hat.

"You and Dominique," she said, "must keep away from each other. Neither of you wants a scandal. You both loved her and one day you may find that you shouldn't hate each other. Would you like to come back and see Mary again? She looks so beautiful."

"No," I said.

"It's a mistake. One should take advantage of a last opportunity. There won't be another." She kissed me on the cheek and went her way.

As I sat there on the bed with the wind beginning to howl outside I heard laughter. It was sensuous deep laughter. That must be Anatilde. She laughed again and I felt like an eavesdropper because that laugh had been, so intimate. Thank God she laughs, I said to myself. So Derek has a sense of humour after all. She laughed again. Good old Derek. Well, I had nothing to laugh about. I got off the bed and went to Mary's photograph and stood before it for a while without looking at it. It was past nine. I'd better go to bed. I undressed, put on my dressing gown, Mary's Christmas present two years ago, and went to the bathroom. The door was locked. "Is that you William?" Derek's

voice asked. So he hadn't been in the bedroom when Anatilde laughed. "Wait," he said.

I waited and he opened the door and I went in.

"I'm off to bed," he said. He was wearing a camel hair dressing-gown from the Army & Navy stores, I suppose. Mine was silk and Mary had bought it at Sulka. "You look like a Carnival parrot," he said, but there was nothing offensive in his voice.

"And you look like a monk," I said. And as I said that I remembered that at the age of fifteen I'd wished to become a monk. I was influenced by Jean-François, M. de Moro's youngest son. I was a lodger in the de Moro family during my whole lycée career. When I told that to Derek the next time I went home, with tears in his usually so conspicuously dry eyes he beseeched me not to throw worldly life away from myself, for I was destined to rise high in the world temporal. And now here we were I with my worldly dressing-gown and he looking like a drab monk.

"If the peons saw you in that they would laugh," he said.

"I won't show myself in my dressing-gown."

"Have you got everything you want?"

"Yes, thank you."

He left and I decided to have a bath. The water, however, was ice-cold. So I only washed and went back to my room.

Our mother hadn't thought much of Mme Barlet. She was too bourgeoisie according to her; and I often wondered what exactly she could have meant by that word used in a derogatory sense. Fundamentally the Edmetts were as bourgeois as the Barlets, the difference being that the Edmetts lived in England and the Barlets in France. In the former you take more exercise and in the latter you eat far better. But taking it all into consideration, basically they asked the same from life. They wanted security. The Edmetts showed that desire less than the Barlets; but on the other hand England hadn't been invaded since the days of the Conqueror. Our mother was convinced that her way of living was less materialistic and smug. And thinking of her I was glad once more that she had died before Mary. It would have

been a terrible shock to her, and mother wasn't born to have shocks. One further proof that she was born far from the German frontier. Mme Barlet's father had seen the Prussians marching up the Champs Elysées.

Thus when Mary died I was quite alone. Mother was dead and so was Mr. Edmett, and when I returned to England there was nobody to go to. I stayed in a mean Bloomsbury hotel and the two months I spent there were two very unhappy months. In the next room there lived an old lady who suffered from asthma. She used to keep me awake most of the night. It had seemed to me in that Bloomsbury hotel that it was rather appropriate for me to possess an asthmatic neighbour. The night porter had only one arm. That suited me, too.

One Sunday I walked down Kingsway and as I reached the little church of St. Anselm and St. Cecilia I went in. Not because I had any yearning for the Mysteries of the Mass but simply because inside the church it couldn't have been worse than in the windswept street. The congregation wasn't an elegant one. Poor people, and exactly because they were poor and not fashionable they wore their Sunday best and therefore they were a gay cheerful sight. I stood near the door. There was a small brass tablet on the first pew. "Pray for the intentions of the donor," the inscription said. I repeated that many times to myself. They were meaningless words as far as I was concerned; and I said again and again, "Pray for the intentions of the donor."

Terrific barking started and I sat up in bed with a start. The barking went on and then it ceased abruptly. That immense physical quiet I had savoured in the afternoon came back with a rush. I listened to it and hoped that Anatilde would laugh. But the night remained unperturbed. I gave the photograph a last look and turned out the light.

FOUR

Next morning it was cold and clear with violent sunshine. I came out of the house and my eyes were dazzled by the light. The sky was of a pale blue and the mountains were like a theatrical set illuminated from behind. There was nobody in the garden excepting old David sunning himself near the door. After a while a man in bombachas appeared and he was holding a slice of beef in his hand and eating it as he progressed along. He gave me an uninterested look and went out but first he closed the gate carefully. I felt sure that Derek must have impressed upon his men in no mean manner to keep the garden gate always closed on account of the dangers that lurked on the other side for David. Then Derek came. He looked pathetically young and serious in the sunshine.

"Let's have breakfast," he said. "Wearing riding boots?"

"Yes," I said. "Any objections?"

"Please yourself. I'll explain your work to you after breakfast." We went into the dining-room and the maid, looking more disreputable than the night before, brought in coffee and put a huge greyish steaming lump of meat on my plate. It was ox tongue.

"Do you often have ox tongue for breakfast?" I asked. Somehow ox tongue for breakfast didn't fit in with the sunshine.

"Twice a week," Derek said. "On other days we either have liver or steak. Don't you like ox tongue?"

"I like it very much." I wanted to add: for luncheon. "Never have any eggs?"

"I don't keep poultry. Too much bother."

Like children, I said to myself.

"Do you want potatoes with it?" he asked.

"Why not?" So I ate ox tongue and mashed potatoes and drank coffee, and when we'd finished eating Derek took

me through the garden, we went into the paddock where the cows were grazing, out through another gate and then we walked down a short rocky lane and there stood a building, a long cabin with a corrugated iron roof. There were similar buildings farther down.

"The smithy, the peons' kitchen, the carpenter's shop and two bunk houses," Derek said pointing down. He took a large key from his pocket and unlocked the door. "You'd better keep this key," he said and handed me the key. He opened the door. It was a store with a counter running from end to end. Blankets and a few ponchos were hanging on a beam which was of the same length as the counter. And there were a few new hurricane lamps too. The shelves were half empty. Cigarettes, some bottles of wine and of spirits, zapatillas and corduroy bombachas, but not many of them.

"This is the stores," Derek said. "It was my idea. Zapala is twenty-five miles away and the men seldom have a chance to go there. Itinerant vendors used to come here and robbed them disgracefully. They can buy in the stores most of the stuff they need. It's chiefly cigarettes."

"Very interesting," I said.

"You'll be in charge of the store," he said.

My heart sank. After all those years in the Barlets' office looking after the laundry I had imagined an outdoor life. Plenty of riding and the opportunity of becoming physically fit. And now it was not to be.

"You couldn't give me something else to do?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I have nothing else for you."

"But, Derek . . ." I began.

"There is nothing else."

"But, Derek . . ."

"I told you there is nothing else." He spoke sharply. "I'm doing my best by you and if you don't want to become the storekeeper then you can . . ."

"Go to hell?"

"Then you can go to hell."

We stood there like two bantams. Rather big bantams but bantams all the same. I hoped he would say something and

put an end to that awful situation. I for one couldn't go back even if going on meant going to hell. "When," I asked in a far from steady voice, "could you drive me to Zapala?"

"In my time," he said.

We remained standing there with the open door behind us and the cold sparkling sun lighting up the snow of the Andes. I took a packet of cigarettes from my pocket. I had only two cigarettes left. I offered him one. My hand was steady.

"Not now, thank you," Derek said. He was pale with anger. He walked to the counter, stopped and then turned back. "Don't let us quarrel," he said. He said that very nicely.

"I'm sorry," I said. "You know I have a bloody temper. Of course I'll take on this job. It was damned nice of you to get me out here."

"I'm going to tell the capataz to let you have a horse. Ride as much as you want."

"That's very nice of you."

"Keep this place open a couple of hours in the morning, and a couple of hours in the afternoon. Here is the inventory."

I went to the counter and looked at the inventory which contained some curious items such as gomina and scent. For men. That store only catered for men who lived an outdoor life and worked hard. But his wife didn't use any scent.

A frail man came in through the door. His face was of parchment colour and he hadn't much hair. He smiled apologetically and his smile revealed two decayed teeth. They were offensive voracious teeth. They didn't fit in with the smile. The white of his eyes was the colour of old, much too often washed crockery.

"Good morning, Garay," Derek said.

"Good morning, señor," he said. His wasn't the native accent. It was light as a feather, and it came from Spain.

"This man," Derek said to me in English, "used to look after the stores. He's a thief. He is no good." Apparently being no good was one of Derek's favourite expressions.

Well, it seemed to me I wasn't much good either. "This is my brother," Derek said in Spanish. So Garay and I shook hands. "You'll hand everything over to my brother," Derek said, "and then you'll report to Don Francisco."

"What sort of work do you want me to do?" Garay asked.

"You'll help the carpenter."

"I don't want to work with the carpenter. You know I'm a sick, weak man."

"I have no room for sick, weak men. You'll work with the carpenter."

"I won't work with the carpenter."

"Then you can clear out."

"I'd prefer that," the little man said.

"Come to my office after lunch," Derek said. "You'll get your cheque. But I want my brother to report first that you handed over the stores in good order." He went out and there we were and I didn't know what to say to him. Garay wasn't helpful. He rolled himself a cigarette, took a lot of trouble with it and put it between his lips and didn't bother to light it. I felt it was my job to start the conversation.

"You're Spanish?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, or rather mumbled, afraid lest the cigarette should detach itself from his lips.

"Which part of Spain do you come from?"

"I come from Coruña and, coño! I wish I was back there." He turned his back on me and looked out through the door and there was Derek on horseback trotting towards the stony ridge. Garay cursed him. He cursed softly without haste and then when he thought that he had cursed enough he remembered his cigarette and lit it.

"What about the inventory?" I asked.

"Oh yes," he said and walked to the counter. Half of the stuff was missing. He must have been a vile little thief and Derek should have got rid of him a long time ago. "Where are those ten tins of kerosene?" I asked, having said nothing about the dearth of matches.

"I don't know," he said. "I made a mistake when I put down ten. I often make such mistakes."

"That's not an excuse," I said.

I began to forget that I was in the store. It was like those endless rows with the laundries in Paris. You needed patience back there. One day while Eugène Barlet and I were shouting in turn at the manager of a laundry in the XIII^e suddenly Mary walked in. It was Spring; but the Paris spring with light rain and occasional sunshine lighting up the rain clouds. The horse-chestnuts weren't yet in bloom but the Seine had already discarded its winter brown. Now it was a pale grey and there was Mary in the doorway.

"Ma chère cousine," Eugène said. He had a fine walrus moustache and when satisfied or proud of itself that moustache would curve slightly up. With Mary in the room it was curling up.

"I came," Mary said, "to see how your office looked."

The laundry manager got up and smirked and wished her good morning and Mary smiled and looked round; she was wearing a Gaby Mono hat. She came over to me and said in English, "You rang me up while I was in my bath. Sorry, Bill." It had been our habit to ring each other in the morning. "When I 'phoned you back you had already gone." I nodded. "To-morrow I'll ring you earlier." The two Frenchmen stood there smiling and their smile implied that though it was rude to speak in a language they didn't understand, they didn't mind, for she was so good to look at.

"Eugène," Mary said, "please let my brother out for a little. I promise he'll be back after luncheon."

Eugène said he didn't mind and before we left he kissed her hand as it befits the cousin of the husband of a beautiful woman. The laundry manager took advantage of Mary's presence and the cheerful atmosphere her presence inspired, and saying that they would be more careful next time left with us and lifted his hat twice to Mary in the street.

"What would I do without you?" I said to her.

Well, I was to find out, though not until years later. I went with her shopping and then we ate at the Cabaret and I was late back in the office and Eugène said that I was setting a bad example by going out in the middle of the morning.

"But why didn't you tell me so before I went out?" I said.

"You know your sister simply disarms me. I'm not a bougre."

But all that had nothing to do with the ten missing tins of kerosene. "Now what about those cigarettes?" I asked the Spaniard.

"It says here two thousand," he said pointing to the inventory.

"And you can see for yourself there are only nine hundred."

I was standing on a step-ladder counting the cigarette packets for the second time. "That must be another mistake of mine," he said in his sad light voice.

I looked at the inventory and calculated that he must be owing about a hundred and eight pesos. "How much pay is due to you?"

"Ninety pesos," he said.

"You'll never get them," I said.

"Why?"

Through the open door Anatalde came into the store. She was wearing a skirt that wasn't well tailored, the coat wasn't any better, and she wore a red pullover and the coat was open. She had small steady breasts under the red pullover. Her eyes were perhaps even more green this morning because of the sun outside. She asked me how I felt and how I had slept.

"I slept very well," I said.

"I came in," she said, "to ask you if you needed anything in your room. Would you like a second chair?"

"No, thank you. One chair will do me quite well."

She nodded seriously. "Are you working here?" she asked.

"I am just starting."

That was the end of our chat. She had nothing more to say and I racked my brain and I didn't find anything to say either. She looked at the shelves, then took a step in the direction of the counter, changed her mind and smiled and went out of the store. She stopped outside and stood for a moment irresolute and the light showed up the shape of her breasts. They aren't the breasts I said to myself of a mean woman. I didn't know exactly what I'd meant by

that. Then she went away in the direction of Uncle Charles' Victorian house.

"I don't want you any more in here," I said to Garay.

He moved towards the door, then came back and said, "Do you think I'll get into trouble for this?"

"You'll be lucky to go from here empty-handed. We're both Europeans. You know what would happen to you over there."

"It wouldn't be the first time that I went to prison."

"That's your business, not mine."

"You learnt to speak Spanish very well," he said and smiled, showing his two yellow teeth. They were all he had.

I waited for him to go. But he stood there thinking for a while and then said, "Your brother has a very bad temper. I am afraid of him." He spoke quietly: he was stating a fact.

"You should have thought of that before."

"You're right there. I don't want to go away empty-handed. I want to make a little money and go to Buenos Aires. I must leave this God-forsaken cold country behind. It kills me." That was a fact, too.

"Then why didn't you take on that job with the carpenter? In a couple of months you could have paid off your debt and then you could have gone to Buenos Aires."

"That's it," he said. "I was a fool." He took off his cap and looked inside as if it contained the solution. "But he has a bad temper. If I went to him and took it back and said I wanted to stay he simply wouldn't hear of it. He's a proud man. I know him. I've been here a year."

"He is a just man."

"That's it," he said quickly. "That's why it would be no use to go to him. He is just and hard." He examined the inside of his cap again. "But his wife. You might ask his wife to speak for me. Surely he listens to his wife."

"Why don't you go to her?"

"I don't know her. I hardly ever see her. The men say that he doesn't let her come near us. I told you he's a proud man."

"I don't know her, either. I only arrived here yesterday."

"But you're her brother-in-law. Please help me."

As a matter of fact Garay and the whole affair were so sordid that I didn't want to go to Anatilde about them. Not worthy of her green eyes,

"Man," said Garay, "you must listen to me. I am a sick man. I have t.b. and I have nowhere to go and they won't give me a job on the estancias. I don't look strong enough. The people are cruel down here. Go and speak to her. Go."

He spoke in a forced loud voice. It was something of an effort and when he had finished he began to cough. There was agony in his yellow-grey eyes because it hurt him to cough. When he had finished he took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his lips. Then he examined the handkerchief. "Go to her," he said, and there was no strength in his voice.

"Stay here till I come back," I said. I wanted to add, and don't go on pinching in my absence, but I didn't on account of his cough. I went back to the garden and a peon was standing near the gate and I asked him if he had seen the señora. "No," he said and from the manner in which he said that I gathered that no further information would be forthcoming from him. So I went into the house and the hall was dark and cold. It was impervious to the sunshine outside. I looked into the sitting-room and it was empty. I returned to the hall and stood there and thought that the best thing would be to go back to the stores. As I stood there I heard singing. It was a contralto voice, not strong but infinitely pleasant and had a nostalgic edge, as though it were the expression of a sentiment that was too deep for the spoken word. The voice was singing a fashionable tango that I had heard in Buenos Aires sung in night clubs and hummed by tram conductors. It was about a man who came home and found his wife in the arms of his best friend. Naturally he killed him, for this is the Argentine, and now in prison he is sorry that on this night which is Noche de Reyes he won't be with his little boy. Tripe; but the voice wasn't tripe.

It floated into the cold hall and gave it light and warmth. I could have stood there listening to it till the end of the

world, which, God knows, had recently seemed near enough to me. The voice gently filled the hall. The staircase had ceased to be atrocious and perhaps there was more light. Then it stopped and I became conscious of the staircase. But it started again and sang another tango and the nostalgia of the voice was even more acute. That voice needed comforting. It began to approach and footsteps became a background to the voice and Anatlde appeared on the landing. She saw me and the voice ceased abruptly.

"How nicely you sing," I said. But it was difficult to talk to her at that distance.

"Thank you," she said and came down the stairs. I became aware of her breasts under the red pullover, though I wasn't looking at her.

"I should like to speak to you," I said as she came nearer. She stopped on the last but one step and now we were of the same height and thus her eyes were on the same level as mine. They were calm and serene and if I came to think of it, it was the same with her breasts. But I didn't want to think of them.

"It's about Garay," I said.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"The man in the stores," I said.

"I don't know the men on the estancia," she said. "You see, señor, my husband considers that the estancia is his own job, so I have little to do with it and so I know nothing about the men."

"Please don't call me señor."

"Yes, Willi-am."

"But that man thinks you could help him." She shuddered.

"Are you cold?"

"A little." It wouldn't have occurred to her to mention it otherwise.

"Wouldn't you rather go into the sitting-room?" I asked.

"Yes, thank you," she said as if the house belonged to me.

"So Derek doesn't tell you anything about the farm?" I asked as we went into the sitting-room.

"No," she said. "A farm isn't a woman's business."

Though he had criticized it a good deal now it seemed

to me that Derek had pretty thoroughly assimilated the Argentine outlook on women. Perhaps it suited him. Every nation has a lot to offer and you pick out what suits you best. French gloves, Welsh mutton, Italian spaghetti and apparently the Argentine cage for women. I smiled and I said to myself that I was generalizing again. Anatilde sat down and I told her Garay's sordid story. The man had embezzled and he was sick and he wanted to stay on and so on and so forth. It wasn't much of a tale and it didn't improve in the telling.

"I couldn't speak to my husband about him," Anatilde said. "My husband would be angry." She made a little movement with her right hand. "Why did he think my husband would listen to me of all people?"

She asked that so seriously that I said I didn't know why Garay wanted her to intervene on his behalf. But I did know. Garay looked at it from his European point of view and to his European eyes that had seemed the correct and most profitable way of approach. He was right, though not here. And not where Derek was concerned. Derek's outlook on a man refusing a job would have been the same in England or France or even Tartary.

"I'll go back to Garay and tell him that you can't help him." In the same breath I should have liked to ask her what she did with herself the whole day long, or as a matter of fact what was there left for her to do with Derek completely in charge of her time and space. "I must return to the stores," I said.

"I think," she said slowly, "that I could help him." She stood up and now we were standing side by side but her eyes were at the height of my neck-tie. "My husband wouldn't approve," she went on. "You won't tell him?"

"Of course not."

"How much money does he owe?"

I said he owed about ninety pesos after deducting his wages.

"And he needs money to go away with?"

I said that was the case.

"If I gave you two hundred pesos he could pay his debt,

couldn't he, and have some money to go away with and perhaps see a doctor?"

I knew that Garay wouldn't see a doctor till he was an inch from the grave. "Possibly a doctor, too," I said.

"I have a few hundred pesos," she said. "They belong to me. My father sends me money presents. For my birthday and for Christmas. I'm going to give you two hundred pesos for that man."

"But that's a lot of money," I said. "And why should you?"

"I don't need money here. Besides, it might help that man. Anyway, it will make him happy right now."

"Look here, I can tackle the money he owes at the store."

"How?"

"If I take his debt over, then he needs no cash to make up the money he has taken from the till. I'm going to repay his debts from whatever sum Derek is going to give me as a salary."

"No," she said, "you are poor. I know from my husband that you are poor. I will do it alone."

"You shan't," I said, a bit astonished by my own generosity. "I can manage that. If you give me a hundred I'll attend to the rest."

"But not a word to my husband."

"Not a word."

"I'm going to get the money."

She went out and I walked to the window and looked out and I was furious with myself. My first day and I was starting off with the debts of an unsavoury individual who didn't mean a damn to me. She came back and handed me the money and I said thank you and she asked again if it were really all right for me to take over Garay's debts. I said yes, it was all right.

"But we won't tell it to my husband," she said.

Then I couldn't resist asking her, "What would Derek say if he found out?"

"He would say that we were wrong in helping him. The man didn't deserve help after he turned down the work he

had offered him. And he would dislike the idea that I didn't agree with him. As a matter of fact I do agree with him but . . ." She made a little movement with her right hand.

"I see," I said and shoved the money into my pocket. "You are very kind." She smiled at me and I said, "You must sing again some time. Your voice is very pretty."

That made her blush and as there was no further excuse to linger I went my way. Garay was waiting in the stores leaning against the counter, his arms folded. "A peon came and bought two packets of cigarettes," he said. He pointed to the change lying on the counter. I told him that Anatlilde wouldn't speak to Derek.

"Why not?" he asked.

"It isn't the habit of women out here to interfere with their husband's business."

Then he told me what he thought of the Argentine. "I lived in a hovel in Coruña but I can tell you I despise the whole crowd of them. I hate them. I'm a finer man than the richest of them."

"Talking of Argentines," I said and handed him the hundred pesos in Anatlilde's name. I hadn't the courage to mention my own noble contribution, for I knew that in the telling I would become so angry with myself that I might even hit him; and it wouldn't have been fair to strike that sick little embezzler. Besides, it wasn't his fault that I was so weak.

"She's a good woman," he said, "and may the Virgin bless her." Then he looked round and still holding the money in his hand as if it were crystallized fruit for Christmas, he said, "Sell me a bottle of caña."

"Must you drink?"

"A little drink is good for me."

I looked up the price and took down a pint bottle of caña. It is a virulent, potent, eau-de-vie.

"No, I want a large bottle," he said.

Well, it wasn't my business, so I gave him a large bottle.

"There are two glasses over there," he said. "You will drink with me." I accepted the drink. He poured

out the drinks and said, "Good luck and good health to her." After that he put the bottle into his pocket, shook me by the hand and went out of the store.

I sat on the counter and nobody came. It was boring and I took the inventory and studied it and then I put it down and then I began to wonder how Derek had evolved in the Argentine. Seven years are seven years; and because we had gone to very different types of schools he was something of a stranger. If, I thought, I tried to work out his conclusions with the help of my experience I wouldn't get far. So I gave up thinking of him and my own schooldays started to hop past me like so many cicadas. M. de Moro in whose house I lived came of a noble family and the noble family hailed from the Midi, and the Midi, according to many soothsayers, wasn't a noble cradle for any family. Be that as it may he was proud of his lineage and even my bath towel which was seldom changed displayed a hearty coronet. He had three sons. Twins, who were of my age, and the third was two years younger and he was my friend and his name was Jean-François. During one of my holidays I told them at home in Devonshire that Jean-François had spent days and days before the 14 Juillet in practising the singing of the Marseillaise, which in a way was new to him, for that was his first year at the lycée and his class had been specially coached by one of the masters to sing it well and clearly as it befits patriotic and civilized French boys, and not to mumble it as most people do. So he sang it many days, and as he and I shared a room I woke up one night hearing him singing it. I switched on the light and wanted to tick him off for disturbing me like that. Jean-François was lying on his back. His eyes were closed and he seemed like a waxen figure. He was singing in his sleep. He had long eyelashes and somehow the singing made them conspicuous.

He sang in a clear girlish voice and I am sure that the master at the lycée would have been satisfied with his singing. I was moved and needless to say it never occurred to me to wake him up. His voice rose with vigour as he reached *Aux armes citoyens* and before it went on to *formez vos*

battalions it ceased abruptly. His eyelashes flickered for a moment and he lapsed back into soundless sleep.

I told that on a hot July afternoon as the family was taking tea in the garden. Mr. Edmett had an efficient gardener and it was a well-kept garden, though slightly yellow on account of the hot Devonian sun.

"That's a very amusing story," said my mother.

"I don't think I could ever sing in my sleep," said Mr. Edmett.

I looked at his bald crown with the few wet tufts of hair brushed across it and I believed him. But later on Derek, who was eleven and of the same age as Jean-François, said to me, "He must be a nice boy. I'm glad you didn't wake him up."

M. de Moro would have laughed in his flimsy way at his son singing in his sleep. However, I didn't tell him. M. de Moro was a man of few but vivid interests. His sons weren't included. He was vaguely connected with the Paris office of Harper's Bazaar. During my seven years stay in his house I was unable to find out whether he wrote, photographed or drew for them. Anyway, that was of secondary importance to him. His chief zest in life was early opera. He could discourse on Peri, Caccini, Agazzari, Monteverdi and Boschetti with the same ease, understanding and enthusiasm as Mme de Moro, a thin hardworking little woman, talked of the Boeuf Bourignon. He was a Peri devotee and it struck my youthful mind as rather ludicrous that the music of *La Dafne* had been lost and thus only the title had survived. "That makes it even more precious," M. de Moro would say.

M. de Moro had a mistress. She was in the background, very far away, yet we, the boys, were aware of her existence. Mme de Moro was not. She cooked, washed, looked after the four of us, mended her sons suits and underwear, and on Sundays went to Mass at Saint François de Sales. Her father had been an army doctor and Saint François de Sales had been his patron saint. She was deeply attached to her father's memory. There was a large bleak photograph of him in the dining-room. He reminded me of Umberto I of Italy,

though the doctor's moustache was of more stupendous proportions.

M. de Moro went out every evening. In the daytime he sat in his study surrounded by piles of old music scores. Once a week he became amazingly active and wrote or drew, I don't know which, for his door was locked and when he had finished with it, he trotted off to the Paris office of Harper's Bazaar. It was a long lugubrious flat in which we lived and he had another lodger beside me. That man went out early in the morning and came back late at night. "He drinks," Mme de Moro said of him. That was all I knew of him. In later years I used to call on them at rare intervals. M. de Moro was still living with early opera and Mme de Moro still had lodgers. She wore the same sealskin coat and went to Mass at Saint François de Sales. My friend Jean-François had become a priest. The twins were respectively in the Army and the Civil Service. Jean-François was at Lyons. When Mary died I went to see him. I spent two hours with him in the mournful town of Lyons. It had been worth it.

A Red Indian appeared in the doorway of the store. My first customer; and I got off the counter ready to serve him. He nodded and stood for a while in the doorway, then came forward. In a high voice which seemed to come from very low he asked for a blanket. I looked up the price, pulled the blanket off the beam, a lot of dust rose and I gave him the blanket. He studied it as if it had a secret which it was his duty to discover. He was a small sickly anæmic creature. He asked for the price. I told him and quietly he handed me back the blanket.

"Don't you want it?" I asked.

He glanced at me and then looked at the shelves and didn't bother to answer. After a while he came back from his reverie, went gently to the door and walked out. My watch said it was twelve o'clock: time to close the stores. Before leaving I bought myself a packet of cigarettes. I put the thirty-five cents into the cash till: my first sale, so to speak. That made me think of Garay and of my handsome present. Then I went out and locked the door. Derek was in the hall.

He was standing there with both hands in his pockets, oblivious of the rampant cold.

"How did you get on?" he asked.

"Nobody bought anything."

"They'll come on pay-day."

"Tell me, how much are you going to pay me?"

"A hundred and twenty pesos a month and your keep."

"That seems a lot of money."

"It is a lot of money."

I wondered what kind of an answer he expected from me. I shifted uncomfortably.

"I regret," he said, "that I can't give you a more interesting job. On an estancia like this there are only two important jobs. The manager's and the foreman's. The first is mine and the second belongs to Don Francisco the capataz."

"I'm sorry that I was so quick-tempered this morning."

"Forget it. But I want you to understand that your present job is the best I could find for you."

"It's jolly decent of you to give me a job at all. God knows what I would have done after Mary's death if you hadn't come to the rescue."

He looked at me, and for the first time his hurt eyes reminded me of the eyes of a parrot. "Wouldn't it have been better," he asked, "if you had stayed with Dominique?"

"That was out of the question."

"I see," he said. He was disapproving. "Of course I know nothing about your life in Paris. And besides, I haven't heard your version."

What the hell did he mean about my version? Who else had a version?

"Do you remember that parrot down at the cottage?" I asked.

"I remember Mrs. Evans's parrot," he said.

Mrs. Evans was the widow of an ironmonger. The parrot was an exceedingly stupid parrot and couldn't speak at all. Mrs. Evans believed that it could speak but was too shy to do so. On Mr. Edmett's little estate there were three cottages. The gardener lived in one: Mrs. Evans rented

the second cottage, and the third cottage was falling to pieces and neither Mr. Edmett nor the cottage cared one way or the other.

"What made you think of Mrs. Evans's parrot?" Derek asked.

Anatilde came out of the sitting-room. The parrot and my reply to come faded out. I thought that was rather fortunate. Anatilde told Derek that David was limping. We went into the sitting-room and he lifted the heavy old dog on the table and examined him carefully. The sitting-room windows faced due south. The sun was beginning to shift. Anatilde's eyes were between me and the sunshine. To be precise: the sun was behind me and her eyes were alight with the sun. I had thought those eyes were always the same, but now I understood that I had been mistaken. She gave me a quick smile; I nodded; and that was the end of the Garay incident.

We went in to eat. This time it was mutton.

"Mutton?" I asked.

"A ewe fell into the river," Derek said. "The men rescued it but it was so cut about that I had it killed. I thought a little mutton wouldn't be bad for a change."

"Do you like mutton?" I asked Anatilde. She smiled but didn't reply.

"Food isn't considered to be as important as all that out here," said Derek in English.

We ate in silence. Anatilde ate very little.

"I spoke to Don Francisco," Derek said. "He'll find you a horse to ride. He'll come and fetch you at the stores around three o'clock." He turned to Anatilde. "My brother is an excellent horseman. He has a fine seat." Anatilde nodded. "You used to ride in France?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

Mary was an excellent rider. She rode side saddle and she was a pretty picture on horseback. Dominique was inordinately proud of being married to a good horsewoman. Mr. Edmett had kept horses. Fat old hacks, faintly reminiscent of his bulldogs; and we all learnt to ride from

Jamieson the groom who had spent the active part of his life in the service of an earl and never forgot it. For Dominique to possess a wife who sat superbly on horseback was an ever recurring pleasure. He had done his military service in the artillery, so he rode too. But that hadn't meant much to him till he married Mary. Then he became a keen horseman and would leave his office on any pretext, not so much to ride as to drive out to the Bois and watch Mary on horseback. I for one didn't think much of people riding in the Bois. Dominique, however, was as keen as pepper. Mary despised hired hacks: so he bought her a horse. "It must be a chestnut," he said, "because of your hair."

Now and then Mary rang up the office and told me that I should ride her horse. That had been arranged between us. She had explained to Dominique that her horse needed exercise every day. Thus I was permitted to leave the office in order to ride her horse. Thus I kept up my riding.

"Misère," Eugène Barlet would say, "a nice way of running an office. The clerk goes riding in the Bois."

Perhaps it wasn't the way to run an office. Not that my presence or absence interfered with the running thereof.

"It'll be great fun to ride again," I said to Derek.

At three o'clock Don Francisco came to the stores. Since luncheon I had sold two packets of cigarettes and one packet of matches. A large, thickset peon bought them and I must have struck him as the best joke of the season. Though he controlled himself in the store, I am certain that he started to shake with laughter the moment he left it. Don Francisco was dressed like the legendary gaucho. Everything he wore was black, excepting the belt which gleamed silver. He wore low boots and sported the most murderous spurs I had ever seen. He was small and had reddish hair and a reddish moustache. It was a fine cavalry moustache. His eyes were light brown: the colour of fudge.

"Don Guillerme?" he asked as he came in. He smiled and shook hands and told me I was welcome on the Estancia la Mariposa. For that was the fine sounding name Uncle Charles had given the place. We went out and I locked the door.

"Let us go and ride round the estancia," Don Francisco said. "Not completely round because that would take us a whole day." He laughed and I was to find out in a short while that words strung on a thread, alias sentences, were a non-stop source of merriment to Don Francisco. He wasn't a reticent person and by the time we reached the corral he had told me that he came from Corrientes, where, pucha, it was hot and he didn't think much of this cold land, but, pucha, he liked working for Don Derek and he had liked working too for Uncle Charles. It was funny to hear him refer to fat Uncle Charles as Don Carlos.

"What was the Scots manager like?" I asked.

"He was a difficult man to deal with, but very just." And Don Francisco laughed to his heart's content.

We came to the corral and a peon stood there with two saddled horses. One was black and that was Don Francisco's mount. The other was a bay gelding with a docked tail and a mane which was reminiscent of a Wild West film. The gelding had limpid kindly eyes.

"What's the horse's name?" I asked.

"Lilly," said Don Francisco.

"Lilly for a gelding?"

"Yes," said Don Francisco.

In the evening I told Derek that I thought that was funny. He didn't even smile.

We rode out into the sunshine and Don Francisco chatted about his native Corrientes, with its tropical vegetation and the heat that was wellnigh unbearable. First we trotted towards the mountains, which in the afternoon sunshine seemed farther away than in the morning. "I wish," I said, "one day, to climb the Cordilleras."

"Ah," said Don Francisco, "that's what everybody says in the beginning. But later one forgets them and now that I've been here for ten years I don't think of the mountains at all. You'll feel the same way after ten years."

Sudden panic gripped me and I could have shrieked out of sheer fright, sitting there on the back of Lilly the gelding. To spend ten years here! Ten years looking at those distant mountains and never to climb them but to sell cigarettes,

matches and blankets and only my poor dead Mary to think of. "Ten years are a long time," I said.

"They are," Don Francisco said. "I've been here ten years. Two years spent on the Pampas, so it's twelve years since I left my home."

"Won't you ever go back?"

"Not likely," he said and shook with merriment.

"Don't you want to?"

"Not likely." He roared with laughter. Then in order to compose himself he patted his horse's neck and said to the horse. "Attorante, attorante, do you want to go to my home in Corrientes?"

Lilly was a sure-footed, docile little animal. Stones were all around us, but Lilly didn't mind.

"Here," Don Francisco said, "are some of our sheep."

We pulled up and a sea of wool was swaying and moving before us. A peon came running towards us and he and Don Francisco entered into conversation. I couldn't follow them. It was too fast and Don Francisco laughed a lot and his laughter overlapped both his and the other man's remarks. He gave the peon a cigarette and that was the end of their chat, and we rode on. We trotted along a stony road, then there appeared a pasture of such smoothness that it almost dazzled me after the grey-brown world of stones, ridges and lonely tufts. "The river is at the other end," Don Francisco said. "Let's go to it." Whereupon he dug his formidable spurs into his horse and the animal bucked, then leaped forward, Lilly followed suit (but didn't buck) and off we went at a mad gallop. Don Francisco rode like a monkey. He and his horse reached the river before us and I think he was enormously proud of that. The river was a sort of large stream, very cold and pale blue and it flowed fast.

"Don Derek," Don Francisco said, "intends to fence it off some day. We lose quite a lot of sheep in the river. They fall in and when the river is high they drown and when it's low they cut themselves and break their legs." Since that was too funny for words he laughed uproariously. I thought of Derek and I felt sure that he didn't approve of

the river. "One sheep more or less makes no difference," said Don Francisco.

"Do you have many sheep thieves?" I asked.

"Hundreds," he said. That was most laughworthy. "If one has as many sheep as your brother one shouldn't worry. We lose hundreds a year, especially when the merchants drive through with the sheep they bought lower south. There is an old saying down here that you start off with ten thousand sheep, lose five thousand and arrive at Bahia Blanca with fifteen thousand." He spluttered. "What about a gallop?" he asked and his spurs were at work again. When we reached the other end of the pasture he said, "Let's go back by the road."

We cantered among the stones and it was amazing how well the horses managed the stones and holes. We turned on to a road and there we walked the horses and ran into a mule convoy. The convoy was an outlandish spectacle. The mules, there were about fifteen of them, were heavily laden, and two men rode in front and four behind the convoy. You could feel they came from far, and when Don Francisco hailed them and asked them where they came from, the convoy capataz called out, "From Chile."

"What was it like up in the mountains?" Don Francisco asked.

"Plenty of snow," the man said, and laughed.

"Is this a load of snow?" Don Francisco asked, pointing at a mule.

"It is," the man said, and even the mules appeared to laugh.

"It will melt down here," said Don Francisco, and the cold air reverberated with merriment. "Attorante, attorante," said Don Francisco to his horse. "They're mad; mad. Ha, ha, ha. Don't you see they're mad? You're mad and I'm mad."

Slowly the convoy passed out of sight. "I wish I could go across the mountains in such a convoy," I said.

"You speak like that because you're young," Don Francisco said.

"I'm not so young," I said. "I'm three years older than my brother."

That surprised him. "Three years older than your brother? Nobody would take him for a young man." Then a thought struck him. "If you are three years older, then why are you in his service?"

"Fate, I suppose," I said.

"And you don't mind working for him?"

"Not at all."

"Life is queer, but one should never be downhearted."

"I am not downhearted." I wondered whether that was true.

"But you would be downhearted if you had to spend a night up there in the mountains. Pucha, it's cold up there. I hate the cold."

"Then why did you leave your hot Corrientes?"

"Why did I?" He laughed. "Perhaps it was too hot back there." He patted his horse's neck. "Too hot, much too hot."

In the evening I said to Derek, "Why did Don Francisco leave his home in Corrientes?"

"Because he murdered. I wouldn't discuss it with him if I were you. He is an excellent worker."

FIVE

I was now a week since I came to live with Derek. The fine weather still prevailed, but the wind was cold and beat hard against the corrugated iron roof of the stores. It was an angry wind that wasn't having it all its own way. There was a brasero in the stores, and I don't know how I would have withstood the cold without it. Garay had left the same day and I hadn't seen him again. As Derek looked through the accounts but once a month, the missing money hadn't been noticed. In three weeks' time I would

"Perhaps I have," she said. "You're the first person to tell me that."

"I am sorry," I said.

"Do women in England and in France drive cars?"

"Yes," I said. There were sheep on the road and I hooted but they had no intention of moving. I went on hooting and then slowly, hardly perceptibly, they began to move off the road.

"I don't know Europe," Anatilde said. "But you know that. Your brother is the first European I ever met."

"And I am the second."

"Yes, Willi-am, you are the second."

The sheep had departed and we drove on. The mountains were aloof in the wind, "My husband is very fond of England," she said. "I often wonder what England is like."

"Oh," I said flippantly, "England is the only country in the world where one can't kick, unpunished, a sick old woman." I was looking at her from the corner of my eye.

"And France, where you lived so long?"

"In France they never say anything stupid on purpose."

She was very solemn. She nodded. "And the Argentine? My country?"

"That's for you to answer."

She smiled. She had a gift for smiling. "My country," she said, proudly, "is the country where anybody can make money if he has the desire to work hard."

"Do you think making money matters so much?" I asked.

"Of course. Everybody wants to make money. Money is the final aim in life."

"Anatilde, you don't really believe that," I said. My voice was a trifle loud.

"I don't know," she said carefully. "My father always spoke of money and so did his friends who came to our house. At school girls were graded according to the wealth of their parents. Ours, you see, is a very rich country."

"Money is unimportant," I said.

"That's the first time I ever heard that." There came a little silence and the wind seemed to yield only inch by inch.

"If money isn't important," she asked slowly, "then tell me what is important?"

"Happiness," I said in a professorial voice.

"But you are an unhappy man," she said.

I nearly let go of the wheel, figuratively of course.

"You are unhappy because you lost your sister."

"What makes you think that?"

"I heard about her from my husband and when you arrived and I saw you for the first time I understood that you were unhappy because you had lost her."

My left hand let go of the wheel and it pressed her hand. "Thank you," I said. "All the wealth in the world couldn't bring my sister back."

She left that unanswered and shortly after she pulled her hand away. We drove on and we had nothing more to say because neither of us made the slightest effort to speak. We reached Zapala around one o'clock.

"Where shall I drop you?" I asked.

"Drop me at the stores, please, and come back to collect me when you have time."

"But we'll eat soon?" It was past one o'clock.

"I don't think I want to eat here," she said.

"But surely you don't want to miss your midday meal?"

"I don't think . . ." She left it unfinished and I looked at her for the first time since I had pressed her hand.

"All right," she said. She said that as though she were taking an urgent decision. "Fetch me here at the stores." Because I didn't understand what it was all about she added, "Whenever I come here with my husband I usually miss my luncheon. He doesn't believe in eating in a fonda." As we were by then before the store I got out and opened the door for her and she went into the store.

I walked to the mayor's house. A few men were digging not far from the mayor's house and pipes lay in a heap with an expectant air: they were waiting to go under the ground. Achaval wasn't among the men. I rang the bell and the same buxom woman came to open the door. I said I was Don Derek Edmott's brother and she said she remembered me. She took me into a room where the mayor was eating the

inescapable puchero. He received me affably. He asked for a glass and the woman put a glass before me and the mayor filled it with red wine. "How are you? How is your brother? How do you like our great country?"

I answered the questions one by one and then asked after Achaval.

"Achaval" said Don Martin, and his voice implied that he wasn't very fond of Achaval, "is a bad muchacho. He is rotten to the core. I sacked him at the end of last week. He doesn't like to work and he is lacking in good will. He shouldn't have come to infest the South. He told me he used to live in Europe and I wish he had stayed there."

"I'm sorry," I said, "for having recommended him to you."

"Don't be sorry," said the mayor. "You tried to do your neighbour a good turn and some day when you'll be in need of help remember that and then help surely will come your way." He picked his teeth for a while and added, "Though I doubt that it would come from a man like Achaval."

He offered me another glass of wine and I said that I should be going. Holding on to his knife he saw me to the door and said *que le vaya bien*, and I said *que le vaya bien*. I emerged into the wind and went to the stores and found Anatlde with two little parcels dangling from her left hand. Her shopping; and I looked quickly round and curiously enough the first thing that caught my eye was a bottle of eau-de-Cologne. I took it off the shelf, but I thought of Derek and his admirable awareness of his own life. So I said to myself: 'Who am I to buy Anatlde a bottle of eau-de-Cologne?' Then I replaced it.

We went out and the wind was like a billowing sail. As she wore no hat her hair embraced her chin and neck and the wind tried to hurl her skirt against her legs; and I saw again that her hips were a tiny bit too large.

"You shouldn't have waited for me," I said. "Why didn't you go to the hotel?"

"But a woman doesn't go alone to an hotel."

She gave me a look that implied that I was an ignorant person. I should have resented that look. But I thought it was rather sweet. In an odd manner it reminded me of

Mary staring scornfully at Mlle Delorme because Mlle Delorme had doubted her capacity to ride my rocking-horse into the moon. Not that I could see or feel the slightest resemblance between Mary and Anatilde. It was just a matter of glorious, likeable ignorance.

"Come along," I said, "this wind will blow you away." A little later I said, "Into the moon." But on account of the wind she didn't hear me.

A Ford stood outside the Hotel Universal and a man on horseback with the complete paraphernalia of a gaucho was talking to the driver. This, I thought, is that amazing contrast you see every day in the Argentine. Two utterly different ages side by side the whole day long. However, there is no bridge between them and they are both untrue because uprooted. Neither past nor present has any strength and they are continuously getting into one another's way. Anatilde stopped before the door and I opened it and we went into the bar-restaurant. Somehow I imagined that Achaval would be there. He wasn't; the company was the same as it had been the day I came there with Derek and Pedro.

I asked Anatilde whether she wanted a drink. "A San Martin," she said. I ordered myself a whisky and soda.

"I've never tasted whisky," she said.

"You must have one after your San Martin."

"Oh no," she said, but having finished our drinks, I said to the woman behind the counter, "Two whiskies, please." Anatilde drank and didn't like it; and the hundred per cent male gathering watched her and I didn't think much of them.

"Thank you," she said, and she coughed and her face went red. "I never drank such a strong drink before."

"Now we must eat," I said, and we sat down at a table, and the table-cloth was dirty and so greasy that you could have made a soup of it. Came the puchero and I ordered a bottle of wine. Conversation was wellnigh impossible on account of the proximity and noise of the other customers. I was longing for the comparative quiet of the wind outside. Anatilde drank the wine with evident pleasure.

"I like wine," she said.

"Why don't you drink it at home?"

"My husband doesn't like it." That was very much that. Later she said, "I wouldn't have believed that you and my husband were brothers."

"He is much nicer than I," I said.

"You don't look like brothers," she said.

A noisy fellow came into the hotel. He was drunk and the clients welcomed him as a conquering hero, and there followed a lot of shoulder slapping and they urged him to sing. He sang a tango in an oily voice and somehow or other his voice and singing reminded me of some one trying to obtain money under false pretences. It was time for us to go. We left the hotel and as I shut the door I felt I was shutting it on at least two dozen conquering male eyes that had followed Anatilde to the door. We got into the car and as Anatilde sat down beside me I realized she was slightly tight. It didn't amount to much.

"How nice the fresh air is," she said.

We drove across the railway line and turned to the left and neither of us spoke and she was right: it was far pleasanter in the fresh air.

Suddenly she said, "Willi-am, your sister was a very beautiful woman."

"How did you come to think of that?"

"But she was very beautiful. I often stand before her photograph in our bedroom and look at her and say what a pity that such a beautiful person is lost for the world."

"I know," I said, surprised that somebody else knew that beside me.

"There aren't enough beautiful people in this world," she went on. "Her loss is irreplacable."

When I had watched the coffin being lowered into the earth I said to myself that every single inch was a thousand years lost for the world. But now I didn't want to think of the lost years. The road was pretty straight and the electric pylons were on our right and left and the wind was harsh and I said to Anatilde, "But you're beautiful, too." Not so long ago that would have sounded like sacrilege and lack of loyalty.

"Don't say that," she said. "You know I'm not beautiful. Perhaps I am pretty, but not as beautiful as your sister."

"Good Lord," I said, "we forgot to go to the station." I stopped the car. "We must go back."

"Yes," she said, but she was a little far from it all.

We turned round and drove to the station and I went into the station building and something in me said I was going too far and I didn't want to go too far. I collected the different parcels and returned to the car. My first impression was that Anatilde had fallen asleep, but she was wide awake, though as far away as she had been before. She smiled vaguely as I got in and we didn't speak and I drove as fast as the road permitted and the wind having changed was now behind us. The road was deserted. The pylons were like poplars of an inanimate age. The Cordilleras were still mounting towards the blue of the sky; and the car's engine was a well-oiled engine and made little noise. Anatilde began to hum and I thought of that first morning when I heard her singing: probably I was slightly tight too. I stopped the car. She looked up and asked,

"What is it?"

"Anatilde," I said, "that morning when I went to look for you about that man Garay, I heard you sing. You remember?"

"You told me at the time."

"Please sing for me."

"Sing?"

"Yes, sing."

"But now?"

"Yes, now."

I had expected she would say no. It had been just an impulse with me because of the whisky and wine. "There is an old Criollo song I know," she said. "Shall I sing it?"

"Yes, please," I said. Then in her contralto voice she sang. It was, of course, a completely untrained voice, but it was there and it welled out like wild flowers that hadn't been planted by expert hands. Wild flowers never are. You see those flowers through train windows and on Welsh hills. My friend Jean-François, the priest, told me that when

as a Parisian child he was taken for the first time to the country he asked M. de Moro who was the gardener who had planted the flowers that he saw through the railway window. "Le bon Dieu," M. de Moro explained; and that, said Jean-François, was one of the reasons why he became a priest.

"Thank you," I said humbly when she had finished. I can't remember the tune or the words. Probably it was one of those tangos I heard a year before in Paris night clubs; or probably it was nothing of the sort. It was like a wild flower which, if you met it in an expensive florist's window, you would be shocked at its price. "Thank you," I said again.

"Did you like it?" she asked.

"You know I did," I said. She smiled. "Now we must go on," she said. "My husband said we should be back before three."

We drove on and the wind came straight for the wind-screen. Anatilde sat erect, both hands in her lap. I didn't look at her for some time. When I looked she was still in the same position. But there was a tiny frown between her eyebrows. A small cloud in midsummer. . . .

Dominique came down to Exmouth to marry Mary. There had been a lot of fuss beforehand. Mme Barlet wasn't in favour of her son marrying in a foreign country. She hadn't wanted him to marry a foreigner, but she gave in because even she couldn't resist Mary. She was, however, definitely set against the idea of the wedding taking place abroad. As she was a Frenchwoman, abroad for her was England. But finally she gave in. Dominique was something of a diplomat. He told her that though he would be taking Mary in marriage in a foreign land the offspring would be born in France. Mme Barlet believed in offspring. Dominique and Mary never had children. In principle they agreed on the subject. They said there was plenty of time. In fact there was so much time that Mary died childless. But that was still to come.

Dominique came over for the marriage ceremony and having, I suppose, consulted his Parisian tailor on the type of suit one wears in the country in England, he turned up

in a suit of Harris tweeds with garish checks and the natives thought he was a bookmaker. The lapels were large and they were, sartorially speaking, lapels generally designed for double-breasted suits. At the wedding he wore a morning coat and he looked smart and distinguished in it. But the night before he said that it wouldn't be proper for him to stay under the same roof with his betrothed, and mother and M. Edmett were upset when he vouchsafed the information that he had taken a room at the Station Hotel. And there he spent the night. Thus the largest guest-room with the best hot-water bottle went a-begging the night before Mary married Dominique.

That night before the wedding (Dominique watching the commercial gents writing letters) Mary left us straight after dinner and my mother sighed significantly and then hurried up to bed with the latest Times Book Club volume in her hand. Mr. Edmett and I went to the library for which the word study would have been more appropriate. A couple of bulldogs snored on the Axminster carpet. "I like that French boy very much," Mr. Edmett declared. "You know, my boy, I'm a great friend of the French. That's why I sent you to a French school." Well, it wasn't exactly for that reason, but it wasn't for me to point that out. "Going up?"

I said I was going up and I went to Mary's room and knocked on the door and she said, "Come in."

She sat on her bed and smiled and I sat down beside her and neither of us spoke for a while and then she said, "So this is the last night." The first night, of course, was the night during which I was born and that was eleven months and three weeks after her.

"Yes," I said and hoped my voice was even.

"Mary will marry," she said and we both laughed and didn't think that was funny. "If one said Mabel will marry it wouldn't sound so hopeful." She waited and I nodded and said nothing.

"Let's have a game of patience," she said.

We had a very special game of patience which Mlle Delorme taught us to play and we had added many new rules to it

as the years augmented. Derek never played it. I went to fetch the cards and we sat down and started to play and then all of a sudden I burst into tears. That was the first and the last time that I cried in Mary's presence. (Since her death I had acquired the habit of only shaking with unshed tears.) Mary looked up. I remember she was going to put an eight of spades on a seven of spades, but put the card down and got up and put her arms round me and because she was standing and I was sitting my head was against her frock which was a woollen frock, though of a far superior material to the frock Anatilde was wearing in the here-now, sitting beside me in the wind-beleaguered car. I cried for some time. I was so ashamed of myself that I hadn't the slightest desire to stop. But I tried to pick up a card and it trembled in my hand and I dropped it in disgust. That made me cry more.

"You silly fool," Mary said. She knew that my tears were the last protest against the years to come. "You silly fool," she repeated. Later she said, "Bill, don't be silly."

"I love being silly," I said.

"You know nothing could separate us."

"But in a year or so I'll have a moustache." I sobbed violently. "You won't have a moustache."

"Perhaps our real father had a moustache," she said. She smiled and expected me to smile too. Therefore I smiled and then I was deeply ashamed of myself.

"Promise you won't tell Derek that I cried," I said. She promised she wouldn't tell Derek. Next morning about ten minutes after the wedding she told me that Dominique would give me a job. Mr. Edmett raised his eyebrows when he heard that, for he wanted to send me into the City. An old school mate of his was a partner in a roller skates importing firm.

"Anatilde," I said. "We'll be there in a moment."

She shifted in her seat. "That was a beautiful song," I said.

"Thank you," she said gravely. She thanked me as if I had been passing her the bread or the salt.

We arrived and she got out of the car, and I drove the car to the garage. I didn't feel like going to the stores. Instead

I went to the corral in which the horses were kept. I found a peon and told him to saddle Lilly. While I waited I suddenly remembered two lines of Browning. I don't know how they floated back into my mind, especially as Lilly had nothing to do with them.

At last my own release was earned :
I took some time in being burned.

I rode off in search of Don Francisco. Ever since Derek had told me that Don Francisco was a murderer I was fascinated by him. I found him near the river and he hailed me with a friendly wave of his arm.

"Ah, Don Guillermo," he said, "so you were in Zapala? A large town that." He laughed and patted his horse. "Attorante, attorante, do you want to go to Zapala?" He replied in the name of his horse. "I am Don Francisco's horse and I hate towns." He laughed for a while and then he said, "Zapala is neither one thing nor the other. I don't know large towns. But once I changed trains in Rosario de Santa Fe, and while I waited I went to the harlots in the Pichincha. I had fun with them, then I returned to the station and there was still a little time left to wait, so I sat there and smoked and then two very nice men started to converse with me and they suggested a game of dice, and do you know what happened, Don Guillermo?"

"No," I said, though I thought I could make a good guess.

"They took all my money with that accursed dice, and I had been working for that money a whole year." He said that without anger and laughed heartily.

We rode on and I said, "You are great singers, you Criollos."

"Ah," he said, "singing is a vice too. One shouldn't listen too much to songs."

"Why?"

"Ah, Don Guillermo, why indeed? I'll tell you a story. I heard that story when I was working in the Pampa. Pity you don't know that rich province. It would cheer you up. Wonderful grass everywhere and no beggar-like sheep but only cattle. Fine healthy cattle. And the grass is fat."

"I had never thought of grass being fat."

"The grass in the Pampa is fat."

"I can almost see it. But what has fat grass to do with your story?"

"I'm coming to it Don Guillermo. Look at that man. He is a Turco."

A Turco didn't mean a Turk. The English, the Americans and the Germans were real people and one knew something about their countries. The French were real, too. They stood for elegance and learning, but were better known in towns. The Spaniard and the Italian were the Criollo's forefathers; hence both were heartily despised. But the other races and nations went under two headings: Turks and Russians. The Turk in question, I believe, was a Greek. And there was somewhere on the estancia a Russian who hailed from Stockholm, though at times they referred to him as a German.

I looked at the man who seemed rather woebegone. We rode on.

"What about that story of yours?" I asked.

"You're curious," said Don Francisco with evident relish. "I won't keep you waiting. Mind you this is a true story. It isn't a macana." Macana isn't a lie: it is a cruel joke dished up in the form of a lie; and it is the same the other way round. In Spain the word is unknown; in the Argentine it expresses a national habit. "There was," said Don Francisco, "in the Pampa a gaucho with a golden voice. He sang better than anybody else and he was proud of his singing. In the evenings when they sat round the fire, after eating the asado, he used to sing and everybody listened with awe and admiration to his singing. It wouldn't have occurred to the other gauchos to sing while he was present. Who wants to look at a hillock in the presence of a proud mountain?" Don Francisco patted his horse's neck and I knew he was enjoying himself.

"Then one night," he went on, "as they sat round the fire with fat grass all around them and the moon above them a stranger walked up to them, sat down quietly and listened till the gaucho had finished his song. Then the stranger

asked leave to sing to them. 'They all laughed, not so much because they resented his impertinence but because they thought he was a fool to volunteer to sing in that gaucho's presence. The gaucho laughed as much as his friends and said, 'yes, sing.' So the stranger rose and sang to them. They had never heard such a beautiful voice before. It made them think of fine horses, fine cattle and fine women and those who sat round the fire said that they could see the horses, the cattle and the women while the stranger sang. When the stranger had finished singing the gaucho said, 'I am through. I'll never sing again.'—'Thank you,' said the stranger, 'for having listened to me.' Then he walked away. There followed silence and then the gaucho wept because he would sing never-more. Then one of the listeners cried out loud and pointed at the stranger's footprints. They were cloven-hoof prints and they led from the camp fire deep into the pampa. Suddenly they ceased and the gaucho and his companions remembered that the stranger had no shadow."

Don Francisco smiled at me and said half to himself. "Who knows? Perhaps it is true after all. But I tell you, Don Guillerme, one shouldn't listen to too much singing." And he was laughing again.

We were by then at the corral and we dismounted and I walked to the stores and there was Derek waiting for me.

"Where were you?" he asked.

"I went riding with Don Francisco."

"Was the stores shut the whole afternoon?"

"I am afraid it was."

"In the future please see to it that the stores should be open in the afternoons."

"I am sorry," I said and took out the keys.

"Don't bother now. I'm going down to the blacksmith. Come with me." I fell in at his side and we walked on the stony ground towards the smithy. "You got me those parcels from the station?"

"Yes," I said. "We had luncheon at the Hotel Universal."

He stopped. "You took Anatlilde to the Hotel Universal?"

"Yes," I said and we walked on. The sun was rapidly setting, as though somebody was chasing him. Gone to

earth behind the mountains, but a few stray shafts, a last protest, converged above the snow. Or so it seemed.

"William," said Derek, "I should have told you before that my wife is a very simple woman. With your Paris experience you would call her primitive."

"What do you exactly mean by that?"

"I'll tell you on our way back."

We had reached the smithy. The blacksmith was a large negroid fellow and his face was dirty and when he grinned I thought he was a real negro. Derek talked to him for some time and I saw the man liked him. But they all liked him and he liked the patriarchal ties and the respect due to the patriarch; though generally speaking they were much older than he. Perhaps that added to the charm.

"He knifed a peon last year," Derek said as we walked back, "but I patched it up between them. He's an excellent blacksmith. I know nobody who could fix up a chata as well as he." A chata is an immense cart with huge wheels and drawn by eight or nine or even eleven horses.

"This is quite a self-contained community," I said.

"Yes, it is, and that's what I like about it. At times I wish it were more self-contained. You see here I know that I'm responsible for everything. If things go well then I know I'm not making mistakes, and if they go badly I can only blame myself."

I couldn't help admiring him for that. "What were you going to tell me about Anatilde?"

"I just wanted to tell you that she is a simple woman with simple tastes and simple ideas, and she hadn't the education and hasn't the sophistication which, for example, our poor Mary had. I don't want you to laugh at her or try to improve her according to your lights and standards."

I admired him no more. It was all very well to build up one's own world but one hadn't the right to keep prisoners therein.

"Oh, we're all pretty simple if it comes down to that," I said lightly, because I was treading on dangerous ground.

"Probably you're right," he said.

"I wonder what sort of a barrister you would have made Derek?"

"What makes you think of that?" His eyes were keen.

"Nothing in particular."

"I don't know. I wouldn't have been happy in London."

"Are you happy here?"

"Yes, because I've made my own life."

I wondered whether he was happy. "Derek," Mary used to say, "hasn't the gift to be happy." But had she been happy? I don't know. She could enjoy a given moment more than anybody else and then there would come hours and hours of depression. She didn't show it but we were so near to each other, Mary and I, that she couldn't hide it from me. Not that she wanted to.

"William," Derek was saying, "what did you do with the five hundred pounds father left you?"

Mr. Edmett had followed our mother to the grave four months after her funeral. But first he tried to provide for us as well as we and the circumstances let him. After our mother's death we went over to the funeral; his real son was building his own world in the Argentine. I volunteered to be one of the pall-bearers and in my ignorance I didn't know that I would have to ride in the hearse. It was a terrible ride in the smooth pompous Daimler hearse. The undertaker was an Irishman and he was a little drunk, it being market day, and he and the driver talked the whole way from church to cemetery, and now and then he glanced at me and winked, for fundamentally we were sharing a secret, though I didn't understand that at the time. A young Marine stood in the doorway of a butcher's shop and stood to attention and saluted, and I felt that our dear mother would have appreciated that prescribed act of courtesy of King's Rules and Regulations very much.

"I'll follow her soon," Mr. Edmett said, after the funeral. He slipped one arm into Mary's and the other into mine, and we walked out of the cemetery and he said, "My heart is broken. There is nothing more to live for." He said that convincingly and his words were innocent of bathos. I think he was surprised because the sun was still shining:

but he didn't despise the sun for that. All his life he had been a man of liberal views. With great difficulty he kept on for another four months and then he went after our mother, and since Mary's death his words had an added meaning.

"It was very kind of him to leave me that money," I said.

"Father was always kind. But what did you do with that money?"

"Spent most of it and bought my passage to Buenos Aires with the balance." I liked that word balance. It almost gave me financial importance. I had bought a return ticket, but I didn't want to tell that to Derek. I felt safe with that ticket, and could look at the mountains with more poise because I had my return passage in my pocket. I also refrained from mentioning the last hundred pounds I was clinging to hard.

"I must go to my office for a moment," Derek said.

I went with him. His office was on the other side of the hall. It was a cold barren room and there were ledgers on the shelves and everything was neat and prim. He sat down and wrote two letters and then he said, "Come up to the bedroom. Anatilde won't be there. She takes David for a walk around this time."

Why, I asked myself, did he want me to go to their bedroom? It was a fairly large room with a double bed. The furniture was black and the double bed was smug and pompous. Yet Anatilde slept in it. There was a long shelf on the wall facing the bed. A lot of framed photographs stood on the shelf. There was a photograph of Mary and one of our mother and Mr. Edmett. Our mother had been a pretty woman and had resembled Mary but without that light of clear intellect that turned the identical features into real beauty where Mary was concerned. But it was a lovable sweet face. Mr. Edmett, the same as in life, looked like a cross between the stage publican and the stage baronet. Surrounded by the hideous frame his eyes still retained their intrinsic kindness; and his cavalry moustache in repose accentuated his love of peace and comfort.

"These," said Derek, "are Anatilde's parents. I wanted you to see their photos."

Two garish coloured photographs hit my eye. There is no other way of describing the sensation. The mother was fat and wore beads round her neck. You see such women in Hyde Park on a Sunday afternoon, and you say to yourself here goes a cook in search of the traditional policeman. There were ripples of fat between neck and chin and they died away in a perfect dewlap. The father was a different type. An ox among men and he wore a stiff straight collar and a black bow-tie. First I thought he was wearing a dinner jacket, but then I saw it was his Sunday best. You see such faces in a Sunday crowd in Northern Italy, but Anatilde's father was a purse-proud arrogant man and lacked the charm and good humour of the Italian peasant and artisan. The mother had Anatilde's eyes. On closer inspection I decided that the mother was a nice woman, even if you looked at her from the policeman's angle.

Derek was watching me intently.

"They're of Italian extraction, aren't they?" I asked.

"The father is," Derek said. "The mother's father was a Spanish immigrant."

"I think Anatilde is more Spanish than Italian. I hated the idea of her being the daughter of that arrogant bullocky person. I was grateful again for never having set eyes on my father and for not knowing who he was and what he looked like.

"I showed you these pictures," Derek said, "because they prove better than anything I could say how very different my wife is from the sort of people you lived with and were accustomed to."

"And pray what are you after?"

"I'll be frank with you. From the moment I wrote to you and asked you to come here I was afraid that you might become a bad influence for her."

"Bad? That's not very flattering." There was, I felt, something rather stilted and rehearsed about our conversation.

"I don't mean it offensively," Derek said. "Don't take it in the wrong way. What I mean is that I don't want Anatilde to become a second Mary, or to have ideas like you and Mary had."

Though I stood there composed I was trembling within

me. Trembling with rage, "What's wrong about Mary?" I asked, and immediately corrected myself. "What was wrong with Mary?"

"Nothing. She was a grand person, but I don't want my wife to get notions that don't suit her."

"You mean that don't suit you. And what's wrong about my influence? You speak as if I had been the cause of Mary's death."

"Don't be ridiculous," he said, though we both knew that the word ridiculous didn't fit into our dialogue. "The trouble with you two was," he went on, "that you told her day and night that she was marvellous, and she told you day and night that you were marvellous, and that wasn't good for either of you."

"You must have been damned observant in your early youth."

"Anybody could see that," he said and blushed. That was a funny sight and his blushing made me suspicious.

"I wish I knew," I said, "who coached you . . ." I stopped because the door had opened and Anatilde came in with David on the lead. Poor David with the whole of Patagonia around him had to be taken for walks on a lead.

"Oh," Anatilde said, and looked at me and gave me a quick searching look. "You're showing our bedroom to your brother?" she asked Derek.

"He wanted to see your parents' picture," Derek said, and his eyes implored me not to let her know that we had been drifting into a nasty row.

"My mama is very beautiful, isn't she?" Anatilde asked.

"She is very beautiful," I said.

"And what do you think of my father?" she asked, and with pride in her father she waited for my reply.

"He's a fine-looking man," I said.

"And he is so good," she said. "Next year I'll go to visit them in Bahia Blanca," she said looking at Derek. "You promised me."

"You'll go to Bahia Blanca next year," Derek said without much conviction. "Come on, William."

I went out with him, but first I gave the room another

glance. It wasn't a woman's room. Like the bathroom it was heavy and masculine and lacked the many little touches that are the very essence of a woman's presence.

"I'm glad we had that talk," Derek said in the passage. "We'll get on much better in the future. I think I've got a bottle of sherry. Let's have a glass of sherry." Awkwardly he patted my arm. He found the bottle and we sat and drank, which meant that he took a thimbleful and I drank two glasses.

"Do you remember," I said, "when I made you wheel me round the garden in the wheelbarrow?"

"Mademoiselle Delorme was furious and said you were cruel for letting your little brother wheel you about. She said I'd get a double rupture." There was no rancour in him. He was savouring that special bit of memory, yet it must have been hell for a child of seven to push around a big strapping boy of ten.

"And," I said, "when I was the general and you were the colonel and afterwards the colonel became the horse and instead of pushing you had to pull the wheelbarrow."

"I remember," Derek said happily. "When we reached our destination I saluted as you got out of the wheelbarrow and you fetched me one because a horse shouldn't salute."

"I was a pretty awful brother to you."

"Oh no," he said, with much conviction, "you were a very good brother to me, though I must admit I often objected to your flights of fancy."

SIX

I was in the store and there with me was the Indian who was interested in the blanket. For nearly a fortnight he came in at least once a day, examined the blanket, asked me to repeat the price, and then shuffled out of the

stores. To-day he seemed in a buying mood. "But," he said, "Spring is here and one should buy blankets in the autumn."

"If you call this Spring," I said.

The sun was there and so was the wind. The wind cut like lashes; the lashes were of ice. The Indian smiled vaguely. I am sure he never understood what I said. It had been difficult enough for his forebears to learn a foreign language in their own country and he definitely had no desire to be bothered with understanding the sort of Castellano this blanket-selling foreigner spoke. That was partly my fault, for I refused to pronounce my words with the Argentine accent. I tried to keep the little Spanish I knew as real Spanish, not out of a sense of purity but as a gesture of solidarity with the three weeks I had spent with Mary in Spain. The money for the three weeks' trip came from Mr. Edmett's legacy. Dominique was livid with rage when we informed him that we wished to go to Spain without him. After we returned from Spain things began to go badly between Mary and Dominique. When he saw that his wife cared for him no more, instead of accepting that hard real fact, he tried to arouse Mary's sympathy by behaving like the great lost martyr that he wasn't. And that made things go from bad to worse. He, however, blamed Spain for it. That was unfair since we had had a wonderful time in Spain.

"If," asked the Indian, "you, señor, cut this blanket in two, you could sell me half of it for half of the price. I'm a short man and this is a large blanket."

It was true he was a short man. They were all short and Derek said they got drunk on pay day and were fierce, boastful and brave under the influence of drink. Next day they dropped back into humility: taciturn and abject humility. But I liked the idea that at least once a week they went back to their pre-conquest days even if only on the fumes of alcohol.

"No," I said. "I can't do that. But why don't you get hold of a friend and buy it between you?"

The Indian smiled and of course he didn't understand

what I said. He took his long sharp knife from his belt and made a movement as if to cut the blanket in two. I shook my head, we both smiled and I wished I could have lived in the days of the Pizarro brothers and been able to persuade them to desist from invading his ancestors' land.

A peon looked in and called to me, "Don Guillermo, a man is here who wants to see you." Suddenly my heart began to beat fast. My friend, Jean-François the priest, wrote to me before I left for South America that he might some day go out on a mission. It wouldn't be to Patagonia, though. Nevertheless, I could almost see him coming through the door with the sun and the wind behind his black ecclesiastical robes. A shadow appeared in the doorway and Achaval walked in. He was unshaved, his coat was in rags, and he was huge and filled the stores. The Indian, taking advantage of the interruption, shuffled out of the stores. He would be back either in the afternoon or to-morrow.

"Well, laddie," Achaval said, "it's nice to see you again." He shook me by the hand and then slapped me hard on the shoulder, a national habit of endearment.

"What brings you here?" I asked.

"I came to see you old pal." He laughed. "I came to throw myself at your feet. Give me a smoke."

I offered him a cigarette, but he said looking at the packets on the shelf, "Give me a packet. I'll pay you by and by."

"Here you are." Without undue enthusiasm I threw him a packet.

"I say," he said, "where are your famous good manners? Throwing cigarettes as one throws maize to pigs."

He smoked avidly, viciously, and I realized he had been without cigarettes for several days. "Broke?" I asked. It was an unnecessary question.

"Stony broke," he said and slapped my shoulder. "Ça gaze vieille andouille?"

I must admit he spoke many languages and spoke them with ease.

"Look here, laddie," he said, "I didn't get on with those crashing bores in Zapala. Don Martin is a swine. An

ignorant God-damned swine. He fired me and there I was out of work and then the thought came to me that my friend Billy (nobody ever called me Billy) would help me and would persuade his brother to give me a job. So I walked the whole way from Zapala."

"Good God," I said. That was some walk.

"I walked the whole day yesterday and a shepherd put me up for the night in a stinking, lousy hut. Now here we are."

"My brother wouldn't . . ." I began and as it happens on such occasions, Derek walked in.

"How are you, my dear sir?" Achaval asked heartily. He said that as one City man saying it to another City man, preparatory to going into lunch at Simpson's. His knowledge of English was weird. He had picked up expressions and intonations from the various strata of society he had met and used them indiscriminately. "How are you keeping, my dear sir?" He was still at Simpson's. "I think I met you before," said Derek. "What are you doing down here? Are you on your way South?"

"No," said Achaval, "I came here because, to tell you frankly, I am broke and I'm looking for a job. I'm in a bit of a mess, old boy. I haven't eaten for days." The down and out gentleman: he was no longer in the City.

"See to it that he gets something to eat," Derek said. The whole thing was distasteful to him, and I was far from blaming him. "It isn't food I want," Achaval said and I was afraid he might ask Derek for a large whisky. "I want work. I can work in congenial surroundings. I want you, Mr. Edmett, to give me a job. Any job will do." He went on like that for quite a while and the more Derek withdrew into his shell the more adamant he became.

"I have a rule on this estancia," Derek said, "to put up anybody for three days. I won't make an exception with you. My brother will show you to the house where you're permitted to sleep for three nights." He walked out.

Achaval waited till he had gone and then said to me, "The bloody bastard."

"He isn't a bastard," I said, "and if you speak like that

you won't even stay the three nights. Damn you. You ought to be grateful to him."

"In my own country? Grateful to a son of a bitch of a foreigner because he gives me a few crumbs in my own country?"

"You'd better shut up. And if we talk of foreigners you're a foreigner too. You saw that Red Indian? Well, he's got the right to speak like that, not you." I expected he'd hit me and that coming from Jack Dempsey's sparring partner wouldn't have been fun. But he burst into laughter.

"You're a funny guy, laddie," he said and laughed hilariously at the very thought that an Indian had anything to do with his country. "I never heard such nonsense." He lit another cigarette.

"Well, three days aren't to be sniffed at. Let's have a drink. What about a little caña?"

I took down the bottle which I kept for my own use and he took a swig and I watched the muscles of his neck. They were like sausages.

"Not bad," he commented. "And so I'll have to sleep in the beggars' hut? Not admitted to the house. My name is Achaval and my father is a senator. But who cares?" He laughed. "But I don't care a damn. Your brother's wife is an Argentine. What's her maiden name?"

"Bassi," I said.

"Common Italian name. Never mind. I, an Achaval, will sleep in the beggars' hut."

"Cut that out," I said and forgetful of Dempsey and his sparring partner I could have hit him.

"All right," he said, "all right. I like you when you're angry like that." He went to the door and I followed him and he stood there admiring the mountains. They were fine in the sunshine and the snow was like the contents of an upset sugar basin. "I am proud of my country. There is no country like it in the whole world."

Thank God, I said under my breath, though I didn't really mean it.

"Now lead me to my new home," he said.

I took him down to the wooden huts of the house main-

tenance personnel. The blacksmith, the carpenter, the lorry drivers and the gardener and the men who looked after the Hereford cattle lived there. They were now sitting round a fire before the kitchen, drinking the eternal maté. Pedro recognized him. "Ah," he said, "so you left the job we found for you."

"Left it and if you give me another job like that I'll cut your head off." He sat down and he was offered maté.

"Now you're all right," I said. "See you later."

As I walked away I heard him say something. I couldn't make out what it was, but it made the other men laugh. I hope, I said to myself, he won't stir up trouble. Anyway, he will be gone in three days' time.

"I am sorry," I said at luncheon to Derek. "It's my fault."

"Well, he'll be gone in three days," he said.

In the afternoon after I closed the stores I went in search of Don Francisco, but they told me that he was away at some outlying part of the estancia. So I saddled Lilly and rode off alone. He was a nice little animal. Pleasant to ride and without vices. A bit jumpy till one got into the saddle, but after that he was docile and at times I felt I was growing very fond of him. He'd had an atrocious mouth when I started to ride him. The Argentine horses are in general treated as if their mouths were of lead. Lilly was improving. I rode down to the river and though I didn't say it to myself in so many words, I was looking for Anatilde. It was her habit to walk David near the river; and there was a little wooden bridge and we crossed it; now the grass was like the fat grass of the Pampa of which Don Francisco spoke so affectionately. Fine elms and higher up pines. I rode slowly and then I saw her.

David was trotting beside her on the lead. Anatilde had a graceful walk. It was neither slow nor quick. You walk like that in procession on the fiesta of the patron saint. She was ahead of me and the wind was behind us. The wind pressed her skirt against her legs and thus every fibre and muscle of her body was mentally visible. To watch her was like inflicting on oneself a wound; and it would hurt

but one couldn't resist it. Her hair was driven forward by the wind and the nape of her neck was clear and it was beautifully virginal. She had a white skin and it was a soft skin, and it was as alive as the wind, the sun and the mountains. Lilly and I were near now.

She stopped, turned round and said, "Willi-am." David with his shrimp of a tail between his legs looked noncommittally at horse and horseman. "William," she said. "I pronounce your name much better. I practised pronouncing it better."

"It is much better," I said. Then I said, "It is very pretty round here."

"The enchantment of the river," she said. You couldn't say that in any other language.

"Yes," I said, "the enchantment of the river."

"And of the trees."

"And of the trees."

She was standing beside Lilly. "You always ride this horse?" she asked.

"Yes," I said. "He's a gelding and his name is Lilly."

"That's a woman's name," she said and didn't smile.

"It is." The wind was as alive and playful as a young kitten. "You look beautiful with those trees behind you." I didn't want to say that, but I didn't want to say most things I said to Anatilde. But some day, I thought, I would say them wilfully and they would be premeditated; and then God help me. Only me.

"The trees are very fine here," she said without looking at me.

"I wish you would sing here, Anatilde, with the river and the trees."

"No, not here," she said seriously. Then she smiled.

"I think you enjoy making pleasant remarks."

"I hope you don't mind."

"One prefers pleasant remarks to unpleasant remarks." She said that solemnly and as a perfect contrast she smiled again. She had a straight little nose and when she smiled her smile wrinkled her nose.

"I want to show you the pool," she said. "Have you seen the pool before?"

"No, I usually go where Don Francisco takes me. Don't you ride?"

"No," she said and I regretted she didn't ride; for it would have been like magic to go riding with her, provided one never came back.

"I will show you the pool," she said and I dismounted and with the reins round my arm I walked beside her. She had much more trouble with dragging David along than I had with walking Lilly. I like walking horses. They are so human when walked; and an empty saddle is an invitation to adventure.

"I love the pool," Anatilde said. She laughed. "When I saw it the first time I said to my husband, please make me a present of that pool."

"And what did Derek say?"

"He said that the pool belonged to the estancia and since he was the proprietor and I was his wife, it naturally belonged to me too." There was no answer to that. "Here is the pool," she said. To be candid, it wasn't much of a pool. The river curved and the bank was steep on the other side and therefore on our side the bank bulged a bit and a landslide in bygone days had separated the bulge from the actual riverbed. As it wasn't waterproof water trickled into the bulge: hence the pool. Fundamentally it was an inefficient nature-made dam. But the vegetation was a different matter. Bushes and a few large elms screened it from the other bank and the mountain. It was a grand atonement for the barren stony landscape we lived in. Because of the melted snow rushing from the mountains the pool was almost level with the meadow. It was of a greenish colour on account of the bushes and the undergrowth, and in a subtle manner it reminded me of eternity; and of nothing less. For eternity must be a pool too and you would come on it just as suddenly.

"Do you like it?" Anatilde asked.

"Very much," I said.

"It was frozen throughout the winter. It always freezes in winter. So does the river."

"It must be like hell here in winter."

Lilly was grazing; David sat on his haunches and was far

from happy. "It is cold and dark in winter," she said. "I wish we could sit down."

"It's too cold to sit."

"So we'll have to stand till we get tired."

That made her laugh. I lit a cigarette and the wind blew out the first two matches. She watched me with interest. "I was wondering," she said, "what you must have been like when you were a child."

"Pretty ghastly," I said.

"My husband says you had a bad temper. Do you still have a bad temper?"

"I don't know. A bad temper is something of a luxury."

I was looking at the water of the pool. It was clear and green and shudderingly cold. To fall into it and to be surrounded by the evergreen undergrowth, and slowly the cold, the water and the slimy touch of the creepers that lived a piscine life would drag one down.

"What was your sister like when she was a child?" Anatilde asked.

"She was a pretty child."

"Willi-am . . ." She corrected herself. "William, you must tell me more of your sister. My husband speaks little of her. I think he doesn't like to dwell on sad memories. So I know nothing worth while about her. She's like something that hasn't existed but is always here."

That seemed to me as good a definition as any.

"She was a stubborn child," I said. "One of my earliest memories is about her. She was about four and a half years old. I was eleven months younger than she and of course I don't remember a lot. But one afternoon our French governess was going to punish her for something or other. When I was a child, children were always punished. Anyway, Mary crawled under the bed because she was afraid of the punishment to come. Our governess pulled the bed away. She wanted to get at Mary, but Mary crawled with the bed. Mademoiselle Delorme pulled the bed round the room and calmly Mary crawled round the room under the bed. Neither slower nor faster and there she was crawling under the bed."

"And now she is dead."

"And now she is dead."

That was conclusive. Lilly was tearing up the grass, and David sat quietly and his quixotic bloodshot eyes declared that he was holding Anatilde on the lead.

"It is a great pity," I said and threw the cigarette end into the pool.

"I don't know," Anatilde said. "William . . ." She stopped and was looking at me.

"Yes, Anatilde?"

"William, would I be a better woman if I were dead too?"

"I don't follow you," I said, because I didn't want to. The meaning of her words was so plain that it saddened me.

"You don't want to understand me," she said.

I could kiss you now, I thought, and then you would know that I understand you. But not yet. There was plenty of time. We were rich in time. "If you were dead," I said, "you could never sing again."

"I could sing with the angels."

"But I wouldn't hear it."

"Perhaps you would."

I searched for my cigarettes and involuntarily pulled at the reins. Lilly stared at me reproachfully and then went on grazing.

"Please, Anatilde," I said, "don't let us talk so stupidly."

"Was that stupid?"

"Very stupid."

"You don't speak as nicely as you did before."

In a timid way she touched my hand. It was short and quick and her green eyes weren't looking at me but at the pool.

"It is too cold," I said.

"Let's walk back," she said. We skirted the pool and there were the mountains again.

"One day we must climb those mountains," I said.

"They're very high," she said and shuddered theatrically.

"And they're so cold."

"Like being dead."

Mary and Dominique talked one day in my presence of the

death of a friend of theirs, a young woman with a girlish face. "She has," Mary said, "the advantage of never getting old."

"You speak nonsense," Dominique said, "the dead are cold and they shiver all the time. And don't forget you couldn't have hot-water bottles in your coffin."

Mary, in winter, invariably had two hot-water bottles in her bed, and that in a French household was a continuous source of comment. According to Louise, the *bonne*, madame would burn herself one night. "Dominique is perfectly right," I said, and Dominique looked at me gratefully; for that was, I think, the only time I ever took his side.

"Anatilde," I asked, "have you any sisters and brothers?"

"I have a brother," she said. "His name is Arturo. He is very handsome. He lived a year in Buenos Aires. He isn't provincial like me. But I wouldn't care to live in Buenos Aires."

"Have you ever been to Buenos Aires?"

"No," she said.

About fifty yards to the left there was a track. Achaval was walking along that track. He was smoking a cigar which, I am sure, he had scrounged from one of the peons. He must have been walking parallel with us for some time. Now that he saw that I had noticed him he waved to me and came over.

"I suppose this is your sister-in-law," he said in English.

"Yes," I said and wished he hadn't come up to us.

"Introduce me to the *señora*," he said in Spanish.

So I introduced him and he bowed and Anatilde shook hands with him. "I heard about you from my husband," she said. "I hope," she said, "that you'll be luckier elsewhere, *señor*." They talked for a few minutes and I must say his manners were good. "I'll take my leave now," he said at the end and they shook hands again, and he said to me in English, "Come and see me later on. I'll be down there in the workhouse." He bowed and walked off in the opposite direction.

"I met him by accident in the train," I said. "I believe he's a bit of a rogue."

"Oh, but he belongs to our aristocracy. His father is a senator and the Achaval family is very well known."

I didn't fancy Anatilde as a snob. "I'm going to ride back," I said.

"Will you come here again to-morrow?" she asked.

"If my presence doesn't bore you," I said.

She shook her head. I hadn't realized before that one could shake one's head with so much emphasis.

As I rode away I changed my mind. It made her somehow more lovable that she was the victim of such a naive, fatuously romantic feeling: unadulterated snobbery. 'My poor darling,' I thought, 'aren't you wonderful because you admire a man for being the son of an Argentine senator?' We crossed the bridge and then we had a good canter and when I walked back to the house, Derek said, "Here is a letter for you."

There was a man in Zapala who, apparently, plied the mail between the township and the outlying districts. The stamp was French and Derek, I saw, watched me intently. I put the letter in my pocket. "It's from Madame Barlet," I said. "I'm off to see Achaval." And nobody has ever taken the trouble to explain to you that it is silly and so vulnerable to be a snob, I said to the stones, though it was meant for Anatilde. I stopped near the smithy, took out the letter and opened it. Mme Barlet had a remarkable eighteenth-century handwriting. I skimmed the lines and found what I was chiefly looking for. Dominique. Dominique, she said, was in better spirits and had I heard of his pneumonia, which she doubted as I already had sailed for the Argentine before that, I would surely be glad to know that he had completely recovered and was back at the office. He had bought himself a two-seater with a very sporting carrosserie; moreover, he would take up winter sports next winter. So Dominique was becoming a sportsman. Next year, I thought, we would find his name on the entry list of the Tour de France; but without admitting it I was glad that he had recovered from his illness. The next question was how long would the sporting phase last? Six months before Mary's death he had decided to become a mystic poet. I believe he took that decision one autumn evening just after dinner.

The rest of the letter was divided into two parts. The first part beseeched me to look after myself in that alien land, the second part described at length the tombstone they had erected for Mary. White marble and gold lettering. The letter ended with, "My dear child, all sorrows must come to an end either here or in the hereafter, and whatever happens don't forget your old friend, and a little bit your mother, Antoinette Barlet."

I wished that moment that I were near her and she wouldn't have to ask me this time to comfort her. Not that, fundamentally speaking, she ever needed comforting.

There were yellowish clouds in the west and it looked as though the fine weather would go with their coming; for the wind was blowing from the west, and I felt that I was gazing at the long chain of tomorrows that would come like the clouds and would bring me rain and hail and aye, even lightning. And Mme Barlet when she hears of the lightning will sigh and say, oh, mon enfant, why must such things happen to you? Nevertheless it will be worth while. I could see that, too. For if you like fire why refuse to burn in hell? Was it disloyal and ungentlemanly to go to hell? That sounded rather funny. I went in search of Achaval. He was in the kitchen and talking to the cook, a thin, elderly Spaniard.

"But if you're a duke or a count," the cook was saying, "you can sell your title when things go badly."

"You're talking nonsense," Achaval said.

"No, I'm not," the cook said. "There was a marquis at Vigo and I know he got at least five thousand pesetas for his title."

"And to whom did he sell it?"

"To a very wealthy merchant."

"You're talking rubbish," Achaval said, and then he saw me and said, "Hullo, laddie."

"What was it you wanted from me?" I asked.

"Just to see you, my dear friend," he said and turned back to the cook. "If what you say is true," he said, "then it's a further proof of how despicable you Europeans are."

The peons laughed and the cook was furious. "Come on," Achaval said to me and stepped out of the kitchen.

"Look here," I said, "if you talk like that you won't stay three days. I'll see to it myself."

"Now then, old pal, don't take it to heart. I was just having a little fun. I know you wouldn't let me down." He gave me a knowing look. "I know you inside out. You wouldn't harm a fly. You'll stand by your friend. You know I am broke and down and out." I shrugged my shoulders. "Go to your brother and ask him to kick me off the estancia." He laughed. "Of course you wouldn't go. You're a real friend." He yawned. "I liked your sister-in-law. She treated me like a man and not like a dog."

"Who treats you like a dog?"

"Your brother."

"My brother is too kind to you."

He yawned again. "I won't argue with you, laddie. You'll be surprised to hear that I'm going to turn in after supper. I've lost the habit of walking twenty-five miles a day. Now be a sport and give me a packet of cigarettes for the night."

I took him to the stores, unlocked the door, lit a match and found him a packet of cigarettes. Then I locked the door and then he said, "You're a grand chap. Good night and please help me if you can. I'm down and out. Rock bottom."

"I'll do what I can," I said, and I wished once more that he hadn't come. "Good night."

Derek and Anatilde were in the sitting-room when I came in. She didn't look up, and I sat down and none of us spoke for a while, and I savoured the fact that neither of us two would mention to Derek that we had met at the river.

"What news?" Derek asked.

"Not much," I said. "They're quite broke in the middle of the week. Practically nobody came to the stores."

"I wasn't referring to the stores," Derek said. "What does Madame Barlet say in her letter? Anything interesting?"

"Nothing interesting," I said.

"How is Dominique?"

"Why are you so interested in Dominique?"

"I'm not interested in Dominique," said Derek and tried to look innocent of all curiosity.

"He is a stranger to you," I said.

"Of course, but he was our sister's husband."

"He isn't that any longer."

"You don't like him?"

"I neither like him nor dislike him. Though it was Mary who died last winter it was Dominique who perished as far as I was concerned." I didn't mean a word of that. But Derek was angry. His eyes were cold with anger; for his wasn't the red-hot fury that came much too often to me.

"Wait a moment," he said and got up. "I'm going to show you something. I . . ." He went out and banged the door behind him.

"William," Anatilde said quickly, "please don't quarrel with him."

"I'm not quarrelling," I said.

"I don't want you to," she said, and I looked straight into her eyes and she was looking at me too. That lasted for quite a while.

"Anatilde," I said, "why haven't you children?" For she must have children. Many children. A long procession of children marching behind Anatilde and every one of them proud of being Anatilde's child.

"My husband doesn't want children. But perhaps it's God's will manifesting itself through my husband's decision. I often prayed for children, but you see it wasn't answered."

Those words in the church in Kingsway came back to me. "Pray for the intentions of the donor." "It can't be God's will," I said. She smiled and her smile didn't say yes and didn't say no. "Why did you ask me that, William?"

"I'll tell you some other time."

"Down at the river?"

"Probably down at the river."

I heard Derek coming down the stairs and my eyes left Anatilde. He came in and he was alone: his anger was no longer with him. "I wanted to show you some old ledgers about the stores," he said, "but couldn't find them."

"I didn't know you kept your account books upstairs," I said and I was amused because he was so obviously lying.

"I keep some old ones upstairs." He offered me a cigarette. "Of course most of them are in the office."

"I've never known two brothers who had such a lot to say to each other," Anatilde said at the end of dinner. Derek smiled happily.

"We have a lot in common, haven't we?" he said.

"We have," I said.

"He usually speaks very little," Anatilde said.

She rose and Derek opened the door for her. "What about a little brandy? You'd like a drink, wouldn't you?"

"Very much," I said.

He got out the bottle of brandy the contents of which I had tasted the evening of my arrival. I hadn't bargained for that bottle.

"How are you getting on with Anatilde?" he asked.

"Very well," I said and gulped down some of that nefarious stuff.

"You took my advice?" he asked.

"What advice?"

"You know what I mean."

"I usually know what you mean."

"That's true. In the end we had the same mother." He nodded for his own benefit. He sipped the brandy and made a wry face. I sympathized with him. "Drink is wasted on me," he said. "I don't really like drinking." He pushed his glass away and I wished I could do the same. But that was out of the question. It would have hurt and upset Derek if I had said that I thought his brandy was pure muck. "Do you remember Muriel?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, indeed. She was a pretty girl. Nothing striking about her, though."

"No," he said, but he didn't sound convincing. "I wanted to marry her."

"I know. Poor Mr. Edmett almost went off his head when you told him."

"I was too young to marry at nineteen."

"Are you glad you didn't marry her?"

"I don't know. I think she would have made a very good wife."

"What is a good wife?" He stared hard at the table-cloth and then he looked up and his eyes were completely blank. "You'd better ask Schopenhauer," I said.

He didn't approve of my levity. "I think it's flippant to put such a question. There are fundamental facts in this world. A good wife is one of them. I believe it's the proof of a flippant mind to try to look for a definition."

"Did you learn that from your Teutonic philosophers?"

"I don't read philosophy in order to find out about everyday domestic matters."

So Anatilde was an every day domestic matter.

"I don't think you have the faintest idea about philosophy," he said in a commiserating voice.

"I think you're perfectly right," I said.

He poured me out another drink. So that was to be my punishment for knowing nothing about philosophy. I thanked him and I drank the horrid liquid in one gulp.

"You know, Derek," I said leaving good wives and philosophy behind, "that I should be jealous of you."

"Why?" he asked, and I was glad to see that he was putting the bottle away. Perhaps he was afraid that I might drink too much.

"Because you've made a success of your life and I haven't," I said.

"You have time."

"No," I said and shook my head. "It's exactly the other way round. I'm getting deeper and deeper into the mess."

"What mess?"

"The mess of knowing nothing, of understanding nothing and of only finding roads that lead nowhere."

"I wish you wouldn't speak like that."

"It's easy for you. You know who you are and what you want."

"But you know too that I want to help you."

Yes, that was true. He had wanted to help me to go and find my real father and he was only six at the time. "I

suppose," I said, "it's the weather. Forget it." I smiled cheerfully.

"Early spring weather is rather trying," he said. "Soon real spring will come. So cheer up." He stood up. "And you ought to smoke less. Too much nicotine is bad for the nerves and bad nerves and feeling depressed go hand-in-hand."

"Yes, Father," I said, and then we both laughed and were in great fettle, and I almost ordered him to push me about in the wheelbarrow.

But that night as I went to my room I felt heavily depressed. So they have erected a tombstone over Mary's grave. I stopped in the doorway and looked with disgust at my bed. I didn't feel like sleeping. They had put up a tombstone; how much would such a tombstone weigh? It would be extremely heavy. Marble is heavy. More weight to keep her underground. I wished Derek had made me a present of that foul bottle of brandy. I could have drunk every drop of it. I remembered the many bottles of caña down in the stores. I hurried down the steps, went through the icy hall and out into the moonlight. I brought back with me a bottle of caña. A dog was barking, but very far away. Otherwise the stillness of the night was as much in evidence as the moonlight; though the moon wasn't as yet strong. As I reached the top landing the door of Derek's room opened and I hid the bottle under my coat. Derek was in the doorway.

"Anything the matter?" he asked.

"I went to fetch some cigarettes."

"Smoking too much," he said pleasantly, and wished me good night and returned to his room.

He is going back to Anatlde, I said, and I took a swig from the bottle and I said to myself that I must try and get drunk. In my room I took a second swig and it seemed to me it wasn't worth my while getting drunk. I regretted having fetched the bottle. I put it into the cupboard and when I got into bed I thought that it would be a good idea to drink a little more. I might fall asleep sooner. But before I could have put my words into action I completely forgot about the bottle.

Mary came to my flat around eight p.m. That was two

days before her death. She had rung me up at the office and told me she would come. I had a date for that night but cancelled it at once. She came punctually. "Does he know that you're here?" was the first thing I asked.

"No," she said. She took off her hat and sat down in the armchair in which two days later her mother-in-law was to weep for her. "We had a terrible scene," she said.

"I'm not surprised," I said.

"He said that he'd kill himself if I left him."

"Blackmail."

"I know, but if he did kill himself we wouldn't call it blackmail."

"What would we call it?"

"Death."

I began to walk up and down and then I stopped. "But it can't go on like that, can it? The man isn't fit to be your husband."

"But according to you, darling, nobody is fit to be my husband."

"Nobody is."

"My poor Bill, we do have a high opinion of ourselves."

We talked like that for some time and then the bell rang and I went to open the door, and there stood Dominique. "You can't come in here," I said. "I don't want you to upset Mary."

"I wouldn't upset her, but I must speak to her."

"Please go away," I said and I was terribly sorry for him because he was so nervous and miserable.

"I should have known that you wouldn't let me in."

"It isn't that," I said, "but we don't want any more scenes."

We stood there in the doorway and I hadn't the strength to shut the door in his face and he hadn't the energy to go. Then Mary came to the door. "You'll catch cold standing there, Dominique," she said. He came into the flat and we all went into my small sitting-room. There Dominique burst into tears.

I went to the window and examined the curtains. It was high time to send them to the cleaners.

"If you leave me I'll die," said Dominique in a tearful voice. "I know I'll die." He wasn't crying any more. He took out his cigarette case (I could see that in the window-glass) and he gave Mary a cigarette, and he called to me and I gave them a light, and I lit up too and we all smoked and Dominique's left hand, which rested on the arm of his chair, trembled; the right was quite efficient with the cigarette. "Why don't you both come and dine with me?" he asked. "We could talk over the whole thing?"

"What thing?" Mary asked.

"Everything," he said.

"All right," said Mary, "let's go and eat and talk of nothing." But first she asked for aspirins.

"Your headache again?" Dominique asked.

"It hurts like hell," Mary said. She took four aspirins.

"You must see a specialist," Dominique said.

"Yes, she must," I said, and he gave me a grateful look.

We went out and there was his car and we went to a restaurant in Montparnasse and after dinner we sat at the Flore and we didn't talk much. Once he said, "If only you were in love with somebody else my position would be so much simpler." He turned to me.

"Why don't you find your sister a lover?"

"If you speak like that I'm going to hit you," I said.

It was a thoroughly gloomy evening. Eventually the whole party went home, by which I mean that Mary went with Dominique and they dropped me at my flat. Next day I didn't see Mary. The following day Dominique rang me up and said she was very ill and the doctors were coming. By the time I arrived she was dead.

I remembered that bottle again but I was getting drowsy. I wished Anatilde would laugh and my next thought was what would Derek say if I knocked on his door and said in my best Spanish: Caridad, señor, let me see your wife with closed eyes. But she had shut her eyes the other evening as we sat before the fire waiting for the maid to announce the dinner. There was deep peace in her face. You imagine a statue would sleep like that. A statue holding a marble baby in its arms; and the baby would sleep too. It occurred to me that I should

smoke another cigarette. And what about the bottle? I contemplated both possibilities and fell asleep.

SEVEN.

At last the Indian decided to buy the blanket. He came to the stores early in the afternoon. His features were resolute: a man out for a buy. The wind was blowing hard and the clouds, resembling immense shaggy beards, were drifting westwards and the mountains were so near that sitting there near the brasero, and looking out through the open door it seemed that I could touch them. The Indian smiled at me. He often smiled and his smile was impersonal. His thoughts and his smile were never connected. It would have been interesting to know what sort of job he had on the estancia, for he always appeared to be able to take time off to come and bargain and smile and not to buy the blanket. But today, I believed, it would be a different matter. In that deep voice of his which was half-way between a croak and a squeak he asked me to let him have a look at the blanket. I took down the blanket and he fondled it affectionately. He inquired again after the price and I repeated the price which, of course, was the same today. He started on a soliloquy but I couldn't listen. A lot of noise, like dust before the wind, rose outside and there were many vocal indications of a full dress row. I thought it must be Achaval and wished from the bottom of my heart that I hadn't met him in the train. The Indian talked on and was expressing doubts on the material of which the blanket was made. A further proof that he was now the buyer all right.

"Wait here," I said and went to the door. As the stores dominated the other buildings I had a good view of what was going on. The blacksmith and the Turco were having a

pukker row. The blacksmith, very negroid and very pale, stood there brandishing a knife and the Turco was gesticulating with a hammer. Derek and Don Francisco and a handful of peons stood between them. I saw at once that the blacksmith was furious and the Turco was drunk. Both were bleeding. The Turco bled from his left arm and the blacksmith had a nasty wound over his eye. Derek, tall and calm, was speaking to both of them. My impression was that the Turco was afraid of the blacksmith. I decided to go down to them and I took a few steps and Derek saw me and called to me, "You'd better keep out of this." I didn't like the tone of his voice. Without really wishing to do so he had a way of implying that this was his show and the Andes were his mountains and he was running the whole outfit which included the wind and the clouds. I went back to the stores and the Indian was in the doorway watching the scene with keen interest and mumbling to himself. As he saw me approaching he returned to the stores and I followed him. He took the blanket and croaked away but he wasn't talking of the blanket.

"They're bad," he said. "They're bad, every one of them." A sad lost smile accompanied his remark. From the infinite height of wisdom he was passing judgment on the conquerors of his race. Derek came in after a while. "I sent for Achaval," he said. "He'll work for the blacksmith. I won't leave the Turco down there. There is always trouble between the two."

"What was it about?" I asked.

"A disgusting business. A woman. She lived first with the Turco then he passed her on to the blacksmith, but whenever the Turco gets drunk he repents and starts a fight with the blacksmith. This is at least the fifth time. I have had enough of it. I'm sending him out with the sheep. That will put a few miles between the two."

"Passed her on?" I asked. "I didn't get you."

"She was first here in the house, then she went and lived with the Turco. I didn't like it but the labour problem is difficult. I suggested to them they should go and get married. They didn't. A year later the Turco grew tired of her and you know there aren't many women round here, so he hadn't

much difficulty in getting rid of her. The blacksmith took her on. First the Turco was delighted to be rid of her, but afterwards he regretted it, and when he has too much to drink he goes and pesters the woman and she goes and complains to the blacksmith and then you have such disgusting scenes."

He took down a packet of cigarettes and put some money on the counter. "I don't mind what they do," he said passionately. "They're an unruly lot and even if I tried I couldn't turn them into a Sunday school gathering. But I've had enough of their muck and dirt. I'll stop them behaving like that. You'll see I'll stop them. I'll clear the whole lot out of here if it goes on like this. If necessary I'll run the estancia alone." That was technically impossible and therefore couldn't arise. I wasn't impressed. However the Indian, though we were speaking in English, became frightened by Derek's voice and when I looked in his direction I found the blanket nicely folded on the back of the chair and the Indian gone.

"Don't you think?" I asked, "that you're taking too lofty an attitude? These people are very different from you and you shouldn't judge them by your standards."

"Do you mean that I should let them carry on like that a few yards from the house where Anatilde lives?"

"She's an Argentine and I suppose she's well aware of the rough and tumble of the life round here."

"You're an ass," Derek said. "In Bahia Blanca where she was brought up she was not only unaware of the existence of people like the Turco, but she didn't even meet decent steadfast people. She only knew her own home."

Funny, I thought, I would never use the word steadfast. "So," I said, "there are only two alternatives for a woman here. Either to live with the blacksmith and the Turco, or to be behind bars." And I said to myself that if I had the guts I could show her a way out. Yes, if I had the guts.

"I wish you wouldn't generalize," Derek said. He lit a cigarette and as an afterthought offered me one. As I took it he said, "At times I wish I hadn't asked you to come here."

"Why?"

"Because you think you're so damned superior."

"I think it's you who are so damned superior. You stand here like a sort of apostle towering above the rest of us."

He was surprised and that hurt look came into his eyes. "Nothing of the sort," he said. "I'm tolerant and I think I have a lot of understanding."

"Probably you have. Don't let us quarrel," I said and I knew there was a large terrible quarrel before us, and one shouldn't waste one's energy in advance squirmishes.

"I wish to God," Derek said, "that people had a little sense of decency." He saw that I was going to speak, so he added quickly, "I wasn't referring to you, William."

Achaval came. He was smoking a small cheap cigar; he was shaved and his huge face after a night's good rest was almost benign. "Well, well, well," he said. "There's been trouble, what? That foreign chappie has a jolly bad wound. I just had a look at it."

"Don't worry about his wound," Derek said. "You told me you want a job here. Right, I'll try you out. You'll be the blacksmith's assistant. You can start right now. Fifty dollars a month."

"So you want me to have a shot at it?"

"Yes or no. Make your mind up."

"Yes," said Achaval and added, "Could I have an advance?"

"I don't give advances."

"But look at me, I'm in rags. Not that I mind that but I haven't any money for smokes and such things. A few dollars is all I ask."

"He can run up a little account here," Derek said turning to me.

"Good chap," Achaval said. "Now, laddie, give me two packets of smokes and ten cigars."

"We haven't any cigars here," I said.

"Not a very well-appointed shop. Never mind. I forgive you this time." He laughed.

"Go and report to the blacksmith," Derek said in his best O.T.C. voice. "But before you go I'd better tell you that I'm not interested in your pedigree, and I don't care a rap

whether your father is a senator or not. You'll be a peon and I'll treat you as I treat the other peons."

"Sure," said Achaval and winked at me and walked out of the stores.

"I don't think he'll do," Derek said, "but he's a big strong man and the blacksmith needs an assistant."

He left me, and I was glad he had left me since it was getting on for five and Anatilde would be taking David for a walk. I didn't ride Lilly but walked to the river. I was the first to arrive and I waited for her near the pool. The wind was making havoc on the surface of the water. Ripples came and ripples went and I was happy and contented and watched the water, and unseen on the other side of the trees were the mountains waiting for the revelation which, in my case, was soon to come. I could hear her footsteps long before I saw her. The wind wafted them towards me and David gave a bark that was short and senile. "There is more wind today," I said as she came round the trees.

"It will bring rain," she said.

"If it rains you won't come out in the afternoons."

"I don't mind rain," she said. "I read somewhere there is a lot of rain in your country."

"Plenty," I said, "but you ought to see the fields under the rain. They're so beautiful and green."

"I think I would prefer green fields but no rain."

"You can't have it both ways."

"I know that," she said seriously. She was standing there with the wind behind her. Her coat was buttoned up and that made her look like a wise young child. Her green eyes were of a light green today, and little wise smiles sat in them.

"It is too cold to sit down," I said.

"Not really," she said but remained standing.

What would Derek say if he found us here? I couldn't be bothered to find an answer. I wanted to be with Anatilde somewhere in the South of France. Not on the seashore but in a house between Grasse and Vence, or to be sitting on the wall of the cemetery of Saint Paul and to look at the fields and the strip of sea where the sky begins to come down.

"You must be thinking of something far away," Anatilde said.

"Why?" I asked.

"You had that look in your eyes. I was watching them. You don't mind?" I shook my head. "Were you thinking of your sister?"

"No, I wasn't."

"William, may I ask you a question?"

"Ask me anything you like."

"Thank you. My husband told me that you dislike your brother-in-law. Do you dislike him very much?"

"I don't think I dislike him any more."

That was true there beside the pool. Mary's going to Dominique has been part and parcel of her life: but Mary's going to death was the end of Mary. And I only resented her end.

"My brother dislikes my husband very much," Anatilde said.

"That's the normal reaction of brothers," I said. That moment I wasn't interested in brothers.

David's right front paw got entangled in the lead. We bent down to free his paw. Our faces were thus for the first time side by side and that proximity made me see clearly the fields and the sea as you see them from the cemetery of Saint Paul. Less than an inch and I could kiss her. The first time I would kiss her I wouldn't let her close her eyes because I would watch her eyes and have them so near me that I should see nothing else but the serenity of those two green pools. "Thank you," she said as she straightened herself. I was still bent and on account of the wind I could see the contours of her knees. The wind was pushing against them. I straightened myself too.

"He is a nice old dog," Anatilde said, "but he snores the whole night."

"I bet you never snore," I said and remembered my desire of the night before to see her asleep. "Why don't we sit down for a moment?" I asked. She sat down on the dry grass but I remained standing. "I want you to do me a favour," I said.

"What is it?" she asked seriously, expectantly. I don't think she would have been surprised if I had asked her to start climbing the mountain right away and not to stop till we reached the highest of all the peaks.

"Close your eyes for a moment," I said.

She shut her eyes at once and sat immobile and her eyelashes were thick and black. It was on account of the eyelashes that her face immediately took on the aspect of complete repose. As I watched her I realized that I had been wrong about the marble statue. Even in repose she was far too alive for that. But to be alive didn't mean with her to be alive in the modern sense. No pushing, no noise, and no grabbing. Her face was alive because it had peace and understanding and therefore it needed no movement, and the sudden flicker of the eyelids which I didn't miss seemed too much and unnecessary.

"You may open your eyes," I said and she opened them.

"Did I snore?" she asked and that made both of us laugh. "If you had kept me with my eyes closed like that much longer I'd have fallen asleep. But it is cold." She shivered a little. "I do hope summer will come soon; but summer comes slowly in Patagonia."

Nature, I thought, hadn't intended her to live in these parts. I would be following the rules of nature if I took her away. Unfortunately I didn't believe in my thoughts.

"My husband," she said, "was angry with the Turco and the blacksmith. I believe it must be the fault of that woman who worked in the house. Have you seen her?"

"No," I said.

"She is big and fat and vulgar. But she was a good cook. After she went off with the Turco she used to come in the mornings to see me and find out how I was getting on. But my husband caught her one morning and of course she never came again."

"What do you think of her now?" That question was more than curiosity with me.

"I understand she is a wicked woman and always stirs up trouble. But I don't say anything against her. You see she liked me even after she ceased to be my cook. I think one

should be grateful for even the smallest present one gets." She scanned my face. "Am I talking nonsense?"

"Of course not," I said in a loud voice.

"Besides," she went on, "one shouldn't criticize other people. One doesn't know what one is like."

"No," I said, "but one must have the strength of one's opinions. That means one should take oneself for granted." I said that slowly and didn't find the precise words for it. (I translate more the thought than the actual words.)

"I see," she said and shivered. It came home to me that she was cold and as I was going to say that it was too cold for her to stay out she said, "Oh, William, you who are so nice and clever why can't you send the wind away and bring the sun and summer instead."

If we hadn't so many years of happiness and such a complete union before us I would have taken her in my arms. But there were so many years to come, provided I had the guts. I felt there in the wind that I had them; I also felt that if I tried hard I might bring the summer and the sun. But there was plenty of time for that, too. "You must go back," I said. She would get her sunshine in due course. We walked as far as the bridge and I stopped and said, "I will be here to-morrow."

"Yes, William," she said and went away and I watched her and reflected that again neither of us would mention to Derek that we had been together and another milestone of intimacy had been reached without toasts and illuminated addresses to mark the occasion. Would I hurt Derek irreparably if I took her away from him? He was so engrossed in the world he had built up around himself that he wouldn't notice if one of its small particles melted into thin air; and everything was thin air for him outside his world. Yet simultaneously he was so easily vulnerable that he would never recover from losing one of his belongings. Both were true. The real question was: would I have the courage to take her away? Yes, I would have the courage. Because I had time I decided to leave it at that. So much time; and it was meet and proper that one shouldn't speak of it. Perhaps not even think of it.

Standing there beside the bridge and holding, as it were, the wind at bay, I wished to imagine that it should all happen without a single word being said. Derek must feel it as we felt it and then he would step aside in silence, and I would open her door and she would awake without my calling her and follow me out of the house and in the silent world our love would be consummated. What a large word: consummated. It had always seemed pompous and pretentious to me. With Anatilde, however, that word would find its own meaning. The cold took no notice of the labyrinth of my thoughts and I walked back briskly, and when I entered the hall the cold hit me anew and here it was of a more vicious and less merciful texture. I found Derek sitting in front of the fire. Anatilde wasn't in the room. "It is cold," I said and as he had pulled the settee up to the fire I sat down beside him. He was holding his hands to the fire and was watching them as though they were somebody else's property.

"I wish we'd get on better," he said suddenly.

"Ever since I knew you I had the feeling that you resented the fact that anybody else had the power of living beside you."

"That isn't true." But my words didn't shock him. "There never was a younger brother more obedient and devoted than I was."

"Till I went to France."

That was perfectly true. As a small child he was devoted to me and adored Mary and was jealous of us because we considered ourselves aloof from a family life to which we belonged but fifty per cent. However, when I left for France it all changed. Mary was a lot with him and he must have felt that he had taken my place and by taking my place he had lost the disadvantage of being only her half-brother. Shortly after he went to his preparatory school and then on to his public school and then it dawned on him that we were ungrateful and not really as romantic as we had set ourselves out to be. I know from Mary that after his first term at school he went to her room and after fidgeting about and looking out through the window, and lifting a book here and shifting a vase there, (Mary loved vases and her taste in vases was

catholic) he said, "I think Mary you aren't grateful enough to Daddy."

"What did you say?"

"Well, Mary, you and William owe him a lot. It wasn't his duty to bring you up."

"Say that again," Mary said.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because if you say that again I'll go to mother and to your father and tell them that you object to my and my brother's presence in this house."

He didn't say that again. On the contrary he returned later and said to her, "Please don't be angry. I love you more than anybody in this world." Which in a critical manner was correct. Yet he could never resist telling her that he disliked her levity. Derek and I, on the other hand, had fallen out about two years later when he casually said to me, "Whenever I think of you I always imagine you as the jailbird."

"Why the jailbird?" I asked.

"Because I think you'll come to a bad end. A prison or something. Your outlook on life is simply frightening."

"I'd rather go to jail than become a pompous ass like you," I said. I was terribly hurt but I didn't show it. Next day I went back to Paris and thus we didn't make our quarrel up. Now and then we exchanged letters, and when he came to Paris with our mother we were both affable, though neither of us had taken back the offensive words. He had been a pompous schoolboy, but he was no longer pompous, only intolerant of other people's minds and thoughts. He didn't say: I know better; with him that went without saying. I saw that clearly and precisely as I watched his hands reddening by the glow of the fire.

"Do you remember when you called me a jailbird?"

"Let's forget that," he said quickly. "I can promise you I've given up passing judgment on you. So you have no cause to quarrel with me."

"What do you mean by passing judgment? You speak as if you knew a terrible secret about me?"

"Perhaps I do," he said, and was sorry for his words and

smiled and said, "We're the last surviving members of our family, don't let us fight."

"I don't want to fight. To be precise we aren't fighting." Anatilde came in, and he rose and said to her that she should sit beside me on the settee and warm herself. So we sat beside each other and we weren't looking at each other but at the fire, and that for the time being was ample. At dinner we spoke of the Turco, and Anatilde opined that perhaps the Turco really loved the woman and had repented for having let her go.

"There is no excuse after the fact," said Derek. "He should have thought of that before. He let her go. That's the fact."

"Certainly," she said, "but he might have thought that he'd be happier without her and now he knows he's worse off. Everybody makes mistakes."

Derek gave me a speculative glance, then he said to Anatilde, "I don't approve of your discussing those people. They're too sordid for you to think of them and speak of them. But I say they can make whatever they want of their lives as long they don't interfere with the work on the estancia. If it weren't so difficult to get labour I'd sack the three of them." He thought that over. "No, I'd keep the blacksmith. He's invaluable."

That was the first semblance of an exchange of ideas I had heard Anatilde and Derek indulge in. Soon after Anatilde left us; Derek followed in a little while; and when I went upstairs and looked at the photograph I said once again that there was no longer Mary. I stopped before the photograph and I wanted to shout at it that if there were a hereafter why didn't she let me know. Before leaving France I went to Lyons to see Jean-François and told him that all belief that had been implanted in me had left me the day of her death. If, I said, I could go to the Witch of Endor and communicate with Mary through her, I'd go like a shot. Unfortunately, I added, there wasn't even a Witch of Endor. Jean-François listened mildly to my outburst, but there was one remark he made that annoyed me and came to me often afterwards.

"A calamity," he said, "either brings the best or the worst

out of one." My reply was that I was sick and tired of generalizations and platitudes. But you couldn't quarrel with Jean-François. "One day," he said walking with me to the station, "I'll be hearing good news from you."

"Do you mean that I'm going to win the Loterie Nationale?"

He smiled. "I said good news." Now I wondered if he would consider that good news that I have eloped with my brother's wife. Probably it wouldn't happen. I hadn't the guts. All I wanted and all I seemed to savour was the cloak-like silence that surrounded Anatilde and me; and here I was looking at the ripe apple and not quick enough to catch it when it fell. I got into bed and wished I hadn't lost the habit of reading at night. For then there wouldn't be those lonely hours of lying stiffly and waiting for sleep to come, and sleep usually hovered in the background till well after midnight. I heard footsteps in the passage. It was Derek. He knocked and I said, come in.

He appeared in his camel-hair dressing-gown looking like a monk.

"Only the rosary is missing," I said.

"You seem quite cosy in here," he said.

It hadn't struck me that the word cosy could be applied to that room. He sat down on the bed and asked me if I was sleepy."

"Not really," I said.

"I wanted to ask you for some time," he said, "about your and Mary's last visit to Daddy."

"Why didn't you ask me before?"

"I'm not impatient," he said. "You always were good at telling a story." He stared at his slippers. "Tell me what the house was like, how Daddy looked and what he said." He was trying hard to control his eagerness.

It was a Friday's morning post that delivered to Mary's address a letter containing two first-class return fares to Exmouth and a cheque for fifteen pounds. A letter was attached to these gifts. In that letter Mr. Edmett asked Mary and me to come over for the weekend: he longed to see us and our presence would surely cheer him up. He signed

himself your lonely father. Mary rang me up at the office and told me about the letter. We hadn't seen Mr. Edmett since the day we buried our mother. "We must go," Mary said.

"Poor old chap," I said. "Let me go alone."

"No," said Mary. "He wants to see both of us." She suggested I should go round to luncheon, and then we could discuss the details. I agreed, and at half-past eleven told Eugène Barlet that I was off. Whenever, I lunched at Mme Barlet's vast flat I tacitly blackmailed Eugène into giving me almost half the day off. He feared Mme Barlet as it befits a poor relative to fear the powerful widow of his first cousin. There being no blood relationship between them he couldn't appeal to family ties. Anyway, poor Eugène wasn't the kind of man who would appeal. He took misfortune too much for granted.

"You'll make an excellent business man," Eugène said with a sigh.

"If you don't believe that I'm lunching with the vieille you had better ring her up," I said.

"I believe you," he said quickly. Eugène would rather have given me a week off than have rung up the formidable old woman.

I went out and the air was vibrant with Paris. It was unconceivable, with late Spring gallivanting in the streets and boulevards, that on the other side of the Channel a middle-aged breeder of bulldogs and subscriber to the *Manchester Guardian* was dying of a broken heart. I stopped at a bar in the Boulevard Haussmann and had a couple of drinks. I bought two bunches of flowers from a woman in the Place Saint Augustin and sauntered on. It was hot. The house in which the Barlet family dwelt was a sombre building in the Rue de Miromesnil. There was a red carpet running up the stairs and the concierge's glass door was surprisingly clean. A little lift, an unconscious replica of a tailor's fitting cabinet, was on the left, but as the Barlets lived on the first floor there was no need to use it. But I usually did since it gave me a thrill to give the rope a tug. I saw myself in the mirrors with a bunch in each hand and it took the lift longer to reach the first floor than walking slowly up.

I presented a bunch to Mme Barlet and sat with her and waited till Mary came in. She wore a large hat that day and she came into the bibelot-ridden drawing-room to see if I had arrived and then she went to take her hat off and Mme Barlet said, "I could look at her the whole day long. She's so beautiful." I nodded. "I bet you'll never get married. You compare every woman you meet with your sister. That won't get you anywhere."

She said that sadly, for she had tried for some time past to find me a wife. Dominique was as keen as she. Dominique hoped that Mary and I would see less of each other if matrimony and its trimmings took hold of me. They introduced me to diverse young women. Unfortunately for them, I remained unmoved. One of the young women was short and fat. "Never mind," Dominique said, "she has a handsome dowry. Besides," he urged me earnestly, "she might lose weight if she lived with a madman like you." There was another whom I could have liked: but Dominique was far too keen.

Now he came home punctually at one and said to Mary, "I rang you up to take you out to luncheon. Why did you say you wanted to eat in?" Then he saw me and there was no reason to ask for an explanation.

"Bill and I are going to England for the weekend," Mary said.

Dominique didn't like that. "Why, if I may ask?" he said and looked annoyed.

"Read this letter," Mary said.

He read Mr. Edmett's letter, and his voice changed at once. "You must go," he said. "When are you going?" We said we would leave Saturday morning. "The poor man," he said.

Mme Barlet wanted to know what it was all about, so I translated the letter to her.

"I felt like that when I heard of your poor father's death," she said to Dominique. "But we women have less time for sentiment. We are just beasts of burden."

In the train next day Mary told me that Dominique had implored her to tell Mr. Edmett that she was happy with him.

"What did you say?" I asked.

"I said I wouldn't upset him."

Mary was already drifting away from Dominique, though neither of them bothered to think of it too much. Or perhaps enough. The weather was fine at Dover and in London we just had time to drive from Victoria to Waterloo. We waited at Exeter for half an hour, and the local train dragged us slowly to Exmouth. It was hot, and the sea was flat and shiny like a polished floor. Mason, who'd been our mother's maid and had since her death been promoted to housekeeper, was waiting for us at the station. She bustled up to Mary and kissed her, for she had known Mary when Mary was four years old, and I shook hands with her and Mason said, "Thank God you've come. You'll cheer up master if anybody can."

"How is he?" I asked.

"Very poorly. Sits in the library the whole day. That's all he does."

We came out of the station, and I looked for the Daimler and it was nowhere. Grier, the butler-chauffeur, used to be proud of the car and it had been a standing joke with us that when he served at table one said that he drove remarkably well, and when he bumped us about in the car one immediately said that his voice was so sonorous when he announced the vicar.

"Where's the car?" I asked.

Mason told us that Mr. Edmett had dismissed Grier a month ago and the car was in the garage and he wished to sell it. He had got rid of Grier because he wanted to be alone. He tolerated Mason owing to the fact that she had been his wife's maid. Mason now ran the house with a girl and the meals were served in the study and the girl wasn't allowed into his presence.

"It makes one's heart bleed," Mason said. "Please argue with him Miss Mary."

Mason believed in arguing. We took a taxi and after the houses fell away it was like driving through a park. The trees were covered with thick foliage and there lurked, I believe, behind each tree a retired colonel of the Indian Army.

The house in which I had spent my childhood was of red

brick and had been built during the reign of the Queen and was slightly Gothic. It looked like a cross between a church and a customs house. "Master is waiting for you in the library," Mason said. A couple of bulldogs dozed in the hall and the door of the library was on the right-hand side. The library was crowded with books and the books were impersonal, for they were but seldom read. The Dictionary of National Biography with its cohorts of volumes was as much part of the furnishing as the leather armchairs and the Gothic stained glass windows. The stained glass added to the gloom of the Dictionary of National Biography.

Mr. Edmett was sitting in an armchair near the window and he rose as the door opened, and it was staggering to see how much he had changed. He had been a fattish man whose fat had been caused through happiness, peace and good living. Now it had all fallen off him and there was only loose skin covering the bones which would soon be following the flesh. He had had small unimportant eyes, but since his face had shrunk the eyes loomed large, and misery had given them an importance one wouldn't have thought them capable of. He came forward and said in a voice that had remained steady.

"My dear children, I knew you'd come."

Mary put her arms round him and they stood there for a while and the sun was trying to break through the stained glass, though by bitter experience the sun should have known better. There were tears in their eyes and Mary took her handkerchief and began to wipe hers, but Mr. Edmett was oblivious of his tears: they had become the living witness of his daily life.

"My dear boy," he said to me and I shook his hand, and he held on to my hand and then he said, "You must be famished."

He rang the bell and Mason came and he ordered tea for us. He pulled two chairs near his armchair and we sat with him and none of us spoke and tea arrived, and he watched us drinking tea and eating cucumber sandwiches; and because of the cucumber sandwiches I felt I was out of France and France had become the distant land of Gaul.

"Won't you have any tea?" Mary asked.

"I don't take much nourishment these days," he said apologetically, and added with a timid smile, "Perhaps my appetite will improve in the autumn. I never could stand the heat."

So we told him that we didn't think much of the heat, either.

"Try a sandwich," Mary said.

"Some other time, dear child." And we all knew there was no other time for him.

But he tried to be cheerful, and when Mary said that she would like to see the garden, he came out with us and as we reached the light of the garden, he stared hard at Mary and said, "You look exactly like her, exactly like her." During our stay he never took his eyes off Mary whenever she was near him. At dinner he talked of our mother and related little stories about her which we either didn't know, or owing to their lack of importance had forgotten long ago. Mason served noiselessly, unobtrusively, and I understood why he liked her near him. Her presence didn't interfere with his memories. Mary was tired and she went early to bed. "Again that awful headache," she said after she kissed him good night.

I sat up with him in the library and suddenly he turned to me and said, "Bill, my boy, you and I are friends. That, if I may flatter myself, is a great achievement for a stepfather." It was rather eerie to hear such ceremonious words from the edge of the grave.

"Yes," I said, "we always were real friends." And I regretted the many jokes I had made at his expense and inwardly apologized for them.

"You know, my boy," he said, "that you were your mother's favourite, and I wouldn't challenge her judgment. She was a wonderful woman." He shook his head perplexed. "She should have stayed a little longer with me." I thought he was going to cry but he controlled himself. "I'm glad, Bill, that you and I are such friends."

"I want to ask you a favour," I said. "Who was my father? You must know. I think you should tell me."

He gazed at his emaciated hand. "Sorry, Bill," he said. "I can't tell you. Your mother never told you and it was her

intention that you shouldn't know. I'm going to abide by her wish. I don't want our first meeting to be marred by her reproaches."

"But you know who he was."

"I know," he said.

I nodded. Anyway, it was something that Mr. Edmott knew. He would take it with him, but it was comforting that Mr. Edmott knew. Later we went upstairs. He stopped outside Mary's room.

"I hope she'll have a good night's rest," he said, and I was certain that he was thinking of our mother. He sighed.

Next day after luncheon we sat again with him in the library. Mason told us that he wouldn't use the drawing-room. His bedroom and the library were the last two landmarks of his swiftly shrinking world. I couldn't help observing how he was narrowing it down. He was smoking a cigar and the cigar reminded me of the easy, opulent life he was leaving behind. He spoke of Derek and regretted that he wouldn't see him again.

"Please don't speak like that," Mary said. "You'll live a long time. You're comparatively young."

"My dear children," he said, "it would disappoint me if I lingered on. My conscience is clear. I am not trying to hasten my release. I am a Christian and, I hope, a gentleman." He gulped hard. "But my release is bound to come. We were one in life and I think I may say that it is my fondest hope that . . ." And he burst into tears. The cigar seemed detached from the tears. He held his head up and the tears streamed down his cheeks and got lost in his moustache.

We left next morning and before leaving he called me to the library. "My dear boy," he said, "I understand from Mary that she is happy and that her husband is industrious and looks after her and makes her life pleasant. But do look after her too. I implore you to remain at her side and I can tell you that I'd die a prouder man if she had been my real child. It would have been a fine monument to leave behind."

The taxi was coming to fetch us and we waited in silence. He had said all he wanted to tell us, and ours was the silence of the station platform after the guard had locked the doors.

The taxi came. Mr. Edmett kissed Mary and whispered to her, "I shall be happy my child, very happy indeed." As we sat in the taxi Mary suddenly remarked, "Death can't be so terrible after all." Well, by now she ought to know.

I looked up and Derek's face was calm, but he wasn't looking at me. He was still concentrating on his slippers. But as I had nothing more to say he lifted his head, then nodded.

"He talked a lot about me, didn't he?"

"A lot," I said.

"I've got quite stiff. Thank you for telling me. Time for sleep, what?"

"Good night, Derek," I said.

I watched him go to the door, open it and close it. I listened to his footsteps in the passage.

I had given him a pretty accurate description of our last visit to his father, but I hadn't seen the point in telling him that Mr. Edmett wanted to leave the house and his money to me. He made that offer the night before we left. "Derek is a rich man," he said. "You are poor, my boy. It wouldn't make any difference to him and it might help you enormously. Besides it would be a token of my thanks for all the understanding and friendship you gave me."

"No," I said. It was out of the question. It would have put our whole family relationship out of joint and though I couldn't explain it to Mr. Edmett, I would have despised myself if I had accepted it. Moreover, it would have hurt Derek. Not because he needed the money but because he too would have felt that our family relationship had been put out of joint. He wouldn't have forgiven his father; and I didn't want that.

I could hear him returning to his room. Anatilde must be asleep. I smiled triumphantly; for I knew what her face was like with her eyes closed.

Incidentally Derek had instructed by cable the Edmett family solicitor to sell the house, the furniture and everything else that had belonged to his father. He had no need of even the slightest souvenir.

EIGHT

It wasn't rain that came but snow. It was light snow as though wishing to apologize for coming in spring. The contents of delicate sugar-basins seemed to have been emptied on the stones, the ridges and corrugated iron house-tops. Queer but the Patagonian snow always reminded me of sugar. Snow at the beginning of October was early and not late for me. The peons, however, wagged their heads and said they had seldom seen such an abominable spring. My first thought was that Anatile would not take David for a walk. It didn't matter: snow could make no difference to the years before Anatile and me. It was a pencilled landscape. Gauguin used to paint such-like pictures of snow before he left to meet his gaudy Pacific colours.

Around noon, Achaval paid me a visit. He came looking despondent, like one of those large dogs they use at Antwerp for pulling too heavy carts.

"Laddie," he said, "I feel terrible. That blacksmith works me like a slave. Who the hell does he think I am?"

"Jack Dempsey's sparring partner," I said.

"Laddie, don't make fun of me. I feel sick."

"What's the matter with you?"

He said his shoulder and arms were stiff. "I am a sick man," he went on. "A glass of caña might save my life."

I gave him a glass of caña. He gulped it down and sat down beside the brasero and took his coat and shirt off. He was a mountain of sinews, muscles and firm flesh. He gazed sadly at his arms and then massaged them, and then he put on his shirt and coat again and said, "I can't stand it. Give me another caña."

I gave him another drink and he asked me to speak to Derek and to ask him to give him an easier job. "But man you look as strong as an ox," I said. "You'd better stick it. My brother wouldn't listen to me."

"It'll kill me," he said in a woebegone voice. "Give me another drink."

"No," I said. "Time you went back to work."

"But, laddie, you're my pal."

"No."

He stood up, sighed and went to the door. "I'll beat the life out of you one of these days," he said, and walked away.

In the afternoon Don Francisco came into the stores. The Indian was with me and having caught sight of the capataz left in a flutter leaving the blanket unfolded on the counter. "A fine day," Don Francisco said. "Snow looks like death and smells like death. I shouldn't have come to this accursed land." He spat into the brasero, the smouldering embers responded vigorously. "It's a fine day for a ride. Lock up the stores and let's have a good gallop."

They never seem to trot in the Argentine.

That would suit me, I thought. Anatilde wouldn't be abroad in this weather. We walked to the corral and I caught Lilly, and we saddled the horses and he whispered many attorantes into the ears of the black horse. We set out over the flimsy snow and once Lilly bucked because of the keen air. There was no wind, and the cold was all on its own. We saw some sheep with snow on their backs.

"Don Francisco," I said, "where does that woman live who causes so much trouble between the Turco and the blacksmith."

"You want to know where the gran puta herself lives? Are you interested in her?"

"Not as a woman," I said and we laughed, though Don Francisco's laugh wasn't convincing.

We cantered along on the snow-covered ridge, and a little valley I hadn't seen before, opened up before us. It was bleak, but almost windproof. The snow lay thick in the valley. It wasn't sugar: it was an honest to God carpet. Carefully our horses descended the slope that led into the valley. A few corrugated iron shanties were scattered haphazard and any moment they might change their minds and walk away. There was no life about. Probably even the corrugated iron was afraid to wake the snow up.

"HOLA," Don Francisco bellowed and the snow was wide awake. We reigned in before the first shanty. "Where is la Marguerita?"

A woman came out and Don Francisco said to me, "That's her." She smiled as if a delicate compliment had been paid to her. She was a large woman with a protruding bust, and hips gynaecologists would have approved of. She had high cheek bones and black hair that made her forehead look wide and flat. Though a mass of flesh, there was something sprightly about her. She repelled me.

"Don Francisco," she called in a deep voice, "what is it you want, you old scoundrel? I'm not in the mood for you to-day." Don Francisco laughed but it wasn't natural. "And this, I take it, is the brother of the boss? A nice fresh young man you are, señor." She looked me straight in the eye. I wished we hadn't come. "What is it you want?" she persisted. "If one speaks nicely to me one can get a lot out of me." Her bosom heaved as she laughed. She had healthy strong white teeth.

"One day we'll have enough of you," Don Francisco said.

"Oh, you barbarous creatures," she laughed. Nothing could disturb her high spirits, which, I suspected, were unassailable.

"Let's go," I said to Don Francisco and as Lilly moved forward she called to me, "Come back, señorito, some other time when this red-haired devil isn't about."

I was glad when we were out of the valley. "What a horrid woman," I said.

"Ah, but she is a woman," Don Francisco said. "She'll make a lot of mischief before we're through with her, or rather before she is through with us."

We reached the ridge and Don Francisco suggested we should walk the horses, for they were steaming. "A horse," he said, "is in every manner different from a woman. If you overwork a horse you kill it. If you overwork a woman she asks for more. But I keep away from women," he went on. "What I say is: respect and love your mother and forget all the other women. They're a bag of mischief." He looked mournfully at the snow. "If it weren't for

women, or rather one woman, I could still be basking in the sun of my native Corrientes."

"You should tell me about Corrientes," I said.

"What you mean Don Guillermo is why did I leave Corrientes?"

"I wasn't thinking of that," I lied.

"You're not speaking the truth." He patted his horse. "Attorante, attorante, our Don Guillermo isn't speaking the truth." He turned to me. "I bet they told you that I murdered a man."

"Murder?" I tried to look innocent.

"Macana," he said. "It was just a fight. What's the time?"

I said it was three o'clock.

"Time for maté," he said. "Come to my hut and let's drink maté."

I said I should like that very much.

His hut was in the same row as the forge and the carpenter's shop. It was small and a large brasero was smoking in the middle, and Don Francisco squatted before the brasero drinking maté, and I squatted too.

"I know," he said, "that you wanted to know for some time past the story of that fight. I saw it in your eyes. I like you a lot."

"That's very nice of you."

"I like you a lot, and I often have put the question to myself why a person who is intelligent and well versed in reading and writing should come and live here with us."

I was surprised. "I came to live with my brother," I said.

"Yes, but your brother is the owner of the land and the sheep and the cattle and the horses, but any old Gallego, whose father had kept a fonda in Galicia, could do your job." He spat. "I say you are wasting your time here, especially as you don't like the life here."

"But I do."

"I'm not trying to persuade you to be sincere with me." He lifted his sombrero and scratched his head. "It doesn't

matter what one does as long as one likes doing it. You don't like it."

There was a bunk in the far end of the hut, a camp stool, and a small table with a couple of photographs on it. You can't move without photographs in the Argentine.

"What about that fight?" I asked.

"You're not sincere with me, but you want me to be sincere with you. Well, you're an educated man and have it your way." He took from his pocket a packet of cigarettes and offered me one, and then took one of those match-boxes with a woman's picture and lit our cigarettes, and then he shook his head and said, "It will disappoint you. It's not much of a story. I used to work on an estancia in Corrientes. It belonged to a German. There was a small town about five leagues away and whenever I got my pay it was my habit to go to town and spend some money on amusement. So did many other men and there were quite a few fights, and if you wanted to be happy in the fonda you had to know how to use a knife. There was a small quilombo, but the women were frowsy and old and I didn't like going there. On a Sunday afternoon about twelve years ago, I went to town and I walked about and had a few drinks and then had a few more drinks. You wouldn't believe how hot it can be in Corrientes during January.

"There was a fair that Sunday and when evening came the booths were lit up. A fine spectacle, I can assure you, Don Guillermo. I stopped before a booth and there were a lot of worthless things for sale. Pen-knives and watch-chains and alarm clocks that never go off and other rubbish."

Don Francisco looked at me with a worldly-wise frown between his hirsute eyebrows. "A woman stood there looking at those trinkets and she was a good looker. She was young and fat and had a very white skin.

"'Would you like me to buy you something?'" I asked and expected her to tell me to go to the devil. But she turned round and laughed at me and said, 'Buy me that necklace.' It was one of those pink necklaces. You know which I mean."

I didn't, but that was neither here nor there.

“ ‘Are you alone?’ I asked. ‘That,’ she said, ‘isn’t the way a man speaks. Only cows and cowards speak like that.’ ”

Don Francisco spat and sucked some more maté, and then he went on.

“I bought her that necklace for ten pesos. She had a way of looking at me which annoyed me a little. Her eyes stared straight at me and while she looked at me I had the impression that her body was coming closer and closer. I said to her, ‘What about going for a stroll?’ She went on looking at me like that and said she didn’t mind. The fair was just outside the town, and there was a field not too far away and it was fenced in, and I said we should go there. She followed me and I helped her over the fence and I can tell you I’d never handled a woman with such a soft body before. I took her to a large dusty bush and there I wanted to make love to her. You couldn’t do anything else with a woman like that. She would have done anything you told her without letting you have the pleasure of thinking that she liked it.”

He swore and lit another cigarette. “I told her to sit down beside me and she sat down and I was all hot and I wanted her badly. I pressed that big soft body of hers against me and she didn’t mind and was neither reluctant nor eager. Then I heard footsteps and I didn’t like that. There was no moonlight but the stars were bright, and there in the distance were the lights of the fair. A man was coming straight towards us. He was a young man like me. I let go of the woman and she stood up, but very slowly. I was already standing. The man went up to her and started to curse her and she said nothing, just stood there and never answered. But now she was looking at him as she had looked at me before. That sent the blood racing to my head. I said to the man, ‘What do you want with this woman?’ He uttered a couple of oaths and said, ‘She came to the fair with me.’ ‘But she came here with me,’ I said. I didn’t want to say that. When the man came, all I wanted was not to have trouble. But now I wanted her to stay with me.”

“ ‘She is coming right back with me,’ the man said. I looked at her and she stood there and she never moved and

I trembled all over and got my knife out. He was a good fighter and he cut a couple of muscles in my left arm, and that you know is very dangerous because with my left arm hanging limply I had no defence left. So I threw my knife and I was lucky and the knife went into his neck, and he fell and when I went up to him to take back my knife he was already dead. Now would you believe it, Don Guillerme that while we were fighting she had disappeared? I never saw that devil of a woman again. I rushed back to the fair but she was nowhere. Anyway, I couldn't linger as soon or later somebody would find that man, and so I left the town and I still wanted her badly. Next day I thought it over and I had the sudden fear that she might tell on me. So I left my native Corrientes and now here I am with the snow and the stones."

He spat again and asked me if I wanted more maté.

"But, Don Francisco," I said, "aren't you sorry for having killed that man?"

He looked at me a trifle puzzled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I often think of that woman," he said. "I wish I could run into her again."

I thanked him for the story and I got up: it was time to return to the stores.

"One moment," Don Francisco said, "I don't want to meddle with your affairs, but if you ever decide to go back to Europe and you're loth to ask the passage money from your brother, come to me. I have a little money put aside, and once you're back in your country and you have luck you will repay me."

Needless to say his words moved me a good deal. I told him so and as I walked through the snow which was beginning to freeze and was slippery, I was puzzled and perturbed. So much human kindness on the one hand and brutal killing for a stray woman on the other. With that insight which is usually only vouchsafed to the inebriated, I said to myself that mine was the golden middle way and that meant that I was neither a killer nor was I generous. Don Francisco was both.

The Indian didn't come again, but Achaval looked in.

"I'm going to give the smithy the miss," he said. "I'm fed up."

"I don't care what you do," I said, "but if my brother finds you here he is going to blame me, so you'd better go and scrounge elsewhere."

"Give me a drink," he said. I shook my head. "Now, look here, laddie, don't be nasty to me. You and I are the only men of the world round here. We should stick together."

In a sense that was the truth, but it wasn't flattering.

"I bet," he went on, "for hundreds of miles round here there aren't any other chaps who know the Palermo, the El Garron, the Schéhérazade and the Kit Kat Club of London."

"I don't know the Kit Kat Club in London," I said, but gave him a drink.

"We're pals," he said. "We're just pals."

It was the case of one old timer yarning with another. Eventually he left me and it was high time, for a couple of minutes later Anatlilde came in. On account of the dark clouds I had lit the hurricane lamp that hung in the middle of the store. As she came in she stopped under the lamp and the cold with the help of the paraffin light turned her cheeks rosy. Because her cheeks were rosy, her eyes were sparkling green. She came in smiling timidly, but when she saw me the timidity went.

"William," she said, "it is too cold and too slippery to go out to the pool, so I've come here for a while."

"I am glad you came," I said.

"Should I buy something from you?" she asked.

"You needn't," I said. "Sit down on that chair over there." She went obediently and sat down on the chair, and I went and shut the door and that, for the time being, was the end of the snow. The brasero smoked a lot and as I glanced at Anatlilde from the door, she seemed like an idol with incense rising towards it. But she was too young and too kind to be an idol. On second thought I turned the key in the lock. Her chair was near the counter and she had put her hand on the counter palm down, and I walked to the counter and leaned against it and examined her hand. Her fingers were long, but large. There was slightly too much

flesh on them and the nails, though scrupulously clean, had never been manicured. That made me feel sad, and I was glad that I hadn't forgotten the address of Mary's hairdresser in Paris. I would take her there the first day. So I wouldn't only give her my love but decently manicured hands.

"William," she said, "if you don't speak I'm going to fall asleep." She laughed that mellow laugh of hers.

"I wish you would sing again," I said.

"It's too cold to sing." She took a piece of paper from her pocket and said, "That song you liked so much. You remember? I put down the words on this piece of paper."

I took the paper from her and for the first time I saw her handwriting. It was neat and outlandish. "Thank you very much," I said.

"It was a pleasure to write out those words for you."

I put the paper into my waistcoat pocket and she watched me. Then she said, "William, what does a woman do in one of those large European towns like Paris?"

I remembered the night of my arrival, when she had expressed a desire to know no other place beside Bahia Blanca.

"Please tell me," she said and lifted her hand off the counter, and now both hands were in her lap and she waited as a child waits for its favourite story.

"In Paris," I began, "a woman . . . let's take a married woman."

"Yes, William."

"A married woman that hasn't any children." For Mary hadn't any children." She would get up around nine o'clock, by which I mean she'd awake at eight-thirty and ring for her maid and have her breakfast in bed."

"In bed? But that is very uncomfortable. I had breakfast in bed when I had the flu and the crumbs got under me and it was extremely uncomfortable. You're not pulling my leg and just telling me what a sick woman would do?"

"No," I said. "I'm not pulling your leg."

"But it's rather late in the day to get up at nine."

"Please let me go on." She nodded seriously. "She has breakfast in bed and it consists of coffee and a croissant and a little butter, but no steaks or ox tongue, or, when a sheep

falls into the river, mutton chops. Then she has her bath and after her bath she dresses."

"I suppose she puts on a very extraordinary dress?"

"Yes," I said gravely, "she puts on a very extraordinary dress. Let's imagine it's early summer. So she has dressed and her car is outside the house and she gets into the car and drives to the hairdresser." Apparently the hairdresser was still with me.

"And what does she do at the hairdresser's?"

Before I could answer there came a knock on the door. We both became silent and watched the door. Somebody tried the handle and we, as the saying goes, held our breath. I exulted in our conspiracy, in our sharing the stupendous secret of being together, completely alone with the paraffin lamp and the brasero. The silence then was disturbed by footsteps moving away. One of the peons, I thought, and he could just as well come later.

"She has her hair shampooed, her eyebrows plucked and her nails manicured, and that takes a lot of time."

Anatilde was listening in wonder and her lips moved preparatory to asking a question; but she had so many questions to ask after the first one that she changed her mind and remained silent.

"Then as it is getting on to noon, and since she has a luncheon date at Larue, she walks down the rue du Faubourg de Saint Honoré and turns into the rue Royale, but first looks into Leroy the watchmaker at the corner."

"Why?" Anatilde asked.

As a matter of fact there was no why. I suddenly remembered that the year before Mary had died she bought me a wrist-watch at Leroy for my birthday. I was still wearing it. "Oh, just to look at watches," I said. "So she turns into the rue Royale and as she's a bit early"—Mary was always a bit early. Now death knows that as well—"she sits down at Weber's and has an aperitif."

"What kind of aperitif?"

I wanted to say not a San Martin, but I didn't. "A Byrrh a l'eau. She sits there for a little while and then she goes on to Larue." Dominique loved Larue. That restaurant was

the acme of luxury for him. He also was fond of the Ritz. In luxury he had no individual taste. Cannes and Dauville; Larue and the Ritz.

"Is she lunching with her husband?" Anatilde asked.

"Yes, with her husband." Mary never went out with other men. It always was either Dominique or me; or the two together.

"And I suppose she drinks champagne with her meal," Anatilde said.

I gave her a quick glance. Her voice sounded rather flat.

"Yes, she drinks champagne," I said. Dominique was a champagne fiend; his mother never drank champagne. Champagne had meant exactly the same to him as having a wife who was a good horsewoman.

"And in the afternoon?" Anatilde asked.

"In the afternoon as she doesn't want to rest on such a fine day, she goes to an art gallery and looks at pictures by Matisse, Utrillo, Picasso, Dufy and Bracque." All those names were unknown by Anatilde. It didn't matter. I would show them to her when our time came. But would it ever come? "In the evening she goes to a show and afterwards dines at the summer Ambassadeurs and then she goes on to the Florence and Bricktops. And when dawn comes she and her husband go home to sleep."

"In the same bed?"

"No, not in the same bed."

She fidgeted in her chair and then she exclaimed, "But, William, a life like that must be very tiring. And it's so empty, so terribly empty." I said nothing. "And is she never at home?"

"Well, yes. I was telling you of a specially crowded day."

"I wouldn't like that life," Anatilde said. "You don't mind my saying so?"

"Not at all," I said.

"A life like that is only for people who don't understand each other and have nothing to live for."

"I think you are right," I said. No, she wouldn't want a life like that. All of a sudden I was grateful to her because she didn't care for that sort of life. "For those who understand

each other," I said deliberately, "there is a different kind of life. They sit on a warm wall on a July evening and look at the cypresses, the flowers, the fields, and the distant strip of azure sea." And I told her of Saint Paul and Vence and Grasse and of the Var valley, and the smile came back to her eyes.

"That would be a life I should like very much," she said. "A little house and all those beautiful trees and fields of yours." We smiled at each other and I felt inordinately happy. Anatilde shifted in her chair.

"William," she asked, "that day in Paris that you described to me, was that a day out of your sister's life?"

"I suppose so."

"Oh, your poor sister, how tired she must have been."

"My sister hadn't the gift of getting tired." She looked at me incredulously. "Of course, everybody reacts differently."

"I know how I would react," she said.

"Well, now my sister can make up for all the rest she has missed."

"I hope so," Anatilde said, "from the bottom of my heart."

I walked to the door and then I walked back and Anatilde was standing. "Going?" I asked.

"It is cold," she said. "You're not angry with me, William?"

"I couldn't be angry with you." She was shivering. "Go into the sitting-room and sit so near to the fire that it should scorch you."

"You're really not angry?"

"I couldn't be angry. Now run along." And I opened the door for her and when she went out, with all the loyalty that only misery and longing could bring out, I was somehow grateful both to Mary and to Anatilde that they weren't alike.

"Thank you for the words of that song," I called after her.

"Thank you for that beautiful description of Saint Paul."

Once again I was glad that words weren't our medium of expression. Nor action, I thought ruefully, after I had closed the door. But why hurt when there was a whole life

before us? Hers and mine together. Then I thought of Don Francisco and the man he had killed. If circumstances and events forced me to kill Derek how surprised Derek and I would be. The man whom Don Francisco had killed must have been equally surprised. Probably he too had picked up that woman at random, and his claim to violent death couldn't have been more than buying another red necklace. The joke, however, was that I would never kill Derek and Derek would never be the victim of fratricide. But the thought that Derek and I could ever meet in a dark field as Don Francisco and the stranger had met, frightened me. I blew out the lamp. I mustn't, I said to myself, have such thoughts, for thoughts reach so easily evil conclusions.

I went into the house and the cold in the hall was viler than the frozen snow outside. We didn't linger over our dinner. The dining-room wasn't easy to heat. Anatilde soon left us.

"I heard Don Francisco's story," I said to Derek.

"A sordid story," he said, and looked at me curiously.

"Terrible. Why should people go about killing each other?"

He didn't bother to answer. He played with a stray fork the maid had forgotten on the table.

"If we had differences," I went on, "we wouldn't resort to killing."

"No," he said. He wasn't interested. He played for some time with the fork and then looked up. "You gave me a lot of comfort last night. You drew me such a good picture of Daddy. I feel much happier about his death."

"Can one feel happy about death?" I asked, and I saw before me a sallow Argentine wearing the black and silver of the gaucho's Sunday paraphernalia, lying in the dry yellow grass with a knife conveniently lodged in his throat. Conveniently for Don Francisco, but not for him.

"I wonder," Derek said. He stared at the whitewashed wall which was so white that it could give comfort or inspiration to nobody. "I think," Derek said, "that if there is a fine reason for it, then death can be great and ennobling. Like holding a bridgehead against the advancing enemy.

And I believe too that as in Daddy's case, when one's life is spent, it is better not to linger or the whole thing wouldn't be clear cut any more."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked. To love your brother's wife, was it the same thing as holding a bridgehead against the advancing enemy? My thoughts were turning like a merry-go-round; but there was no music to accompany them. I tried to listen.

"If, for instance, Derek said, 'Daddy had fallen in love with old Mason and had made a fool of himself?'"

"But in that case he might still be alive."

"That's true. But I should hate to have a father who'd made a fool of himself."

"But life is so important," I pleaded. "I'd rather starve than try to interfere with life. Anybody's life. My own included."

"That makes no sense," he said. "You haven't got a very precise way of expressing your thoughts."

"Probably because you don't know my thoughts."

"That's very likely," he said drily.

"If Don Francisco had robbed that man, he would have had a chance to compensate himself by robbing or working or scheming. But he killed him. That's the end of everything."

"I think, William, your trouble is that you attach too much importance to the dead." He rose. "It's cheap and romantic to love death." He stopped at the door and turned back. "All the loyalty one owes to the dead is to let them rest in peace."

"Rubbish. Where did you get hold of that undertaker's slogan?"

I was surprised to see that his face had gone red and there was anger in his eyes. "You'll find out some day where I got that from," he said and added in a calmer voice. "I'm going to bed."

The fool, I said as the door closed. He thought I was trying to sort my thoughts out about Mary whereas I was trying to get a reassurance from him that I would never do him any harm.

I opened the front door and went out into the cold night. The lopsided foreign moon was up in the sky which was a little above the mountains. The snow was white like death and once again I marvelled at the lack of imagination that had made black the colour of death. There is nothing as white as death. I stood outside Uncle Charles's Victorian house and I wanted to go down to Achaval and then take him to the stores and have a real booze up and no bones about it. A sheep dog barked, and another sheep dog answered and silence drifted back, and I realized that I hadn't the slightest intention of spending the next cold hour in Achaval's company. So I returned to the house. As I passed Derek's door I heard him talking and it was his precise voice speaking slowly, distinctly the alien Spanish tongue, and I said to myself that was the voice of a man who believed neither in life nor death. That thought gave me a snatch of comfort.

In my room I stood before the window and stared at the back-view of the night I had contemplated downstairs. Later I drew the curtains and went and stopped before Mary's photograph, and as I looked at it Derek's words came back to me. The only loyalty one owes to the dead is to let them rest in peace. That was stupid and meaningless, just as meaningless as that plaque in the small church in Kingsway which said "Pray for the intentions of the donor." What were the intentions and who was the donor? Not that it mattered either one way or the other.

"Mary," I said to the photograph, "I don't know yet, but I do believe that it will happen that I'm going to take Anatilde away. She is Derek's wife. Do you mind, do you object if we are happy and live a long blissful life, the sort of life you and I always believed in, but never came our way?"

I watched the picture carefully. No man or woman should come and tell me that photographs can't change their expressions. Since Mary's death I had lived with that photograph day and night, and I had seen it frown and approve and smile and be sad. So now I stared at it hard and then I felt there was somebody behind me. I turned round quickly and of course there was nobody. I looked again at the picture

and Mary's eyes said that she approved. That sufficed me. All there was left to do was to fix it up with myself and try to forget that I loved Derek my half-brother. Anyway, that didn't matter. Don Francisco had killed a complete stranger and never had the chance to find out whether the stranger was likeable or not. In my case it was so much simpler that I almost felt sorry for Don Francisco. When I went to bed I felt much calmer and laughed at the thought of killing Derek or anybody else. That sort of thing was all right for Don Francisco; but I didn't wear, and under no circumstances would wear, a silver belt.

Anatilde and I would depart without causing trouble to Derek or havoc to his life. For was it not Derek who had offered umpteen years ago to help me to find my real father?

NINE

The snow stayed on for two days, and then it went and wind and sunshine took its place. The peons agreed that they had seldom seen snow so late in Spring. As most of them were from other provinces and territories, and as hardly any of them had seen more than three or four springs in Patagonia, I wasn't impressed by their wisdom. "The majority of them," Derek had said some time ago, "consider themselves more strangers in Patagonia than we do." That, I believe, was correct; but Derek had the gift of knowing things correctly and precisely. At school he hadn't been much good, yet I had already discovered that he remembered his Latin and Greek better than I. My Latin and Greek had been pretty good during my Louis le Grand days. Thinking of Louis le Grand, I remembered that I had been instrumental in bringing Mary and Dominique together.

Dominique was in my class and the two elder Moro boys looked down on him because he was the son of a restaurateur. They looked down on him as most people look down on money, and that means that they went out of their way to impress upon Dominique that they had condescended to forget that his mother was wealthy, and now that they had so kindly forgotten that, how much would Dominique pay them? Dominique was the last person in the world to be impressed by that attitude. He was a brilliant boy and good-looking with the sort of looks that elderly women like to protect. He and I were good friends, though he was three years older than I. He had been a sickly child and therefore had started going to school at a later age than most of us. I was rather undeveloped for my age, and as nature in his case was making amends for early neglect, our friendship was that of the elder boy's protective affection for the younger. Add to that that I was a foreigner and that was a further reason for Dominique to take me under his wing. Long before he had even heard the name of Mary he used to ask me on Sundays to his mother's flat, and both the food and surroundings were real luxury after the sordid simplicity of the Moro household.

In those days Dominique had one great desire, and that was to go into the French Navy. "If my mother resists me I'll run away from home," he said. But Mme Barlet was too subtle for Dominique, and Dominique was never able to explain how she had succeeded in whisking him into the firm of Barlet, Père et Fils a year after his baccalaureat. His naval longings soon forsook him and he came to like his work, though now and then he rebelled against it, but only in thought.

One sunny Easter the wind blew hard. The same wind was blowing on both sides of the Channel, but with rain on one side and with sun on the other. My mother came over to Paris and Mary came with her. They stayed at the Edouard Sept. I booked them seats at the Folies Bergères, a place of entertainment I had heard a lot of, yet hadn't visited. Mother was doubtful about it, but with all the haughtiness of seventeen I assured her that the Folies Bergères was a grand institution, and it was silly and insular to be afraid of it. So we went

to the Folies Bergères and that was during the heyday of Mistinguette, the Perroquet and Paris Americans. The curtain went up on a galaxy of naked women, and my mother was shocked and Mary blushed and looked away. I was in a worse predicament than either of them. They at least were women and thus familiar with their own anatomy. But those naked ladies were the first undressed women I had ever seen, and seeing so many of them and in such abundance I just didn't know where to hide myself. Now and then I raised my head and, carefully averting my gaze from the stage, I looked at mother and Mary. They sat rigidly and when the interval came I said with miserable aplomb that I would have a drink at the bar.

It took me some time to find the bar. I ordered a gin fizz, having read a lot about gin fizzes in Mr. Arlen's novels, which at that date and age had impressed me a lot. I stood there sipping my drink in a grown-up fashion, and a stately gentleman approached me and inquired whether I wished to repair with him to a nearby house, where I could partake of the caresses of a lady he could warmly recommend, while waiting for the next act. Having lived for years in the bosom of French life uncontaminated by foreigners' night life, I left my drink unfinished and hurried back to our box. I was glad when in the middle of the next act our mother suggested that we should go. We dined at the hotel, and the dining-room was full of people who looked like provincial solicitors that had come over to Paris to investigate matters connected with a will. It was a silent dinner and once our mother said, "So this is the sort of life you lead here."

I was far too ashamed to admit that it wasn't my life at all. The next morning I rang up Dominique and told him what had happened. He was amused. I begged him to ask his mother to invite my mother and Mary to tea, for, I thought, meeting a respectable family like the Barlets, the bad impression of the night before would surely evaporate.

"Is your sister pretty?" Dominique asked.

"She's the most beautiful girl in the world," I said.

He told me to wait, and when he came back to the telephone he said that it was all right and his mother would like them to

come to luncheon. I arrived at the Edouard Sept at ten in the morning. "Mother," I said, "we've been invited to lunch with some French friends of mine. They're frightfully nice people. We must be there at one o'clock." My mother didn't seem enthusiastic. "You'll like them," I said.

"Bill," she said, "you mustn't forget that Mary's only a child."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, after last night I think the question is unnecessary." Eventually she sighed and we went to lunch with the Barlets. Thus the naked girls of the Folies Bergères were the reason why Mary and Dominique came to get acquainted with one another. We weren't ten minutes in the flat before Dominique pulled me aside and said, "You were right. Your sister is the most beautiful girl in the world." Then with the bravado and awe of twenty he added, "I have a good mind to marry her." And marry her he did two years later.

It was funny, exasperating and moving to think of all that here in the stores, with the wind buffeting the corrugated iron walls and the Indian arguing about the blanket. His line to-day was that now that the snow had gone it would be foolish of him to make the purchase. It was ten in the morning and I was sitting on the counter and there was the chair upon which Anatilde had sat yesterday and the day before.

Our wordless intimacy had grown rapidly, and yesterday I had touched her shoulder by mistake and I was annoyed because she would be so completely mine that it was unnecessary to . . . Even for that I couldn't find words. The Indian looked up and Derek came in. "I had a chit from my German neighbour," he said. "He wants us to go over to lunch with him. He's a nice man. His name is Tuercke and he's a good and helpful neighbour. Come to the house at half-past eleven."

He went out, and the Indian lingered on and said he would come back later in the day. Anatilde was standing beside the car when I turned up. She was wearing a black dress and a long black coat, and though they didn't come from a good tailor, she looked well in them. Black suited her green eyes.

Derek wasn't wearing riding boots but an old tweed jacket and flannel trousers. He should have come in that get-up to Paris on Bank Holiday. Anatilde carried a black bag: it was old and faded. Probably her mother had bought her the bag the year before she got married. I don't think Derek would ever have thought of such a trivial matter as a woman's hand-bag.

We got into the car and Anatilde sat beside him and I sat behind, and my eyes weren't on the landscape but on the nape of her neck which was white, and I thought that when our time came I would stroke her neck. I looked at my hand, for my palm felt the anticipatory sensation of stroking the nape of her neck. Moreover, in this car she had sung that song to me. Derek had forgotten to bring matches with him; when he took out his packet of cigarettes he asked me for a match. As I leaned forward to give him a match my hand couldn't resist touching her neck. It lasted less than a second and that second was briefer than the beginning of a thought: yet I said to myself that I had snatched that second from all the years to come.

The German's estancia was nearer to the mountains. There were more trees and the grass was of a more luscious quality. As I had mostly been brought up in France and as Jean-François had sung the Marseillaise in his sleep, it seemed to me that it was a shame that a Boche possessed such a good piece of land. The mountains were toweringly near; I wondered if Anatilde was thinking of them as I had thought that evening when I offered to climb them immediately, provided she came with me.

"How did the German get hold of this farm?" I asked.

"You mean estancia," Derek said. "He came here like most estancieros. He bought the land before the war. Uncle Charles cut him all through the war, but after the Armistice he went over to him and said that it had been a good fight, let bygones be bygones and he was willing to forgive and forget. Herr von Tuercke cried on Uncle Charles's shoulder."

"How disgusting," I said.

Derek grinned. "A bit of a joke," he said. "But he is an excellent and helpful neighbour." The grin disappeared.

The German's house was built with a good bit of homesickness for a German shooting lodge somewhere in Thuringia. As I hadn't ever been to Thuringia, I had no idea what a shooting lodge in Thuringia would be like. Nevertheless, that was how the house struck me. Her von Tuercke was a wizened baldheaded little man. He was waiting for us outside the house, and since he could have had no notion about our exact arrival, he must have been standing there in the wind for a considerable time. He came and opened the door of the car and his face was like the face of a griffin. A thin griffin at that. He had a sonorous deep voice and he had the habit of cocking his head sideways listening, I suppose, to the twittering of heraldic birds. He made a lot of fuss of Anatilde and kissed her hand.

Before Derek could introduce me, he shook hands with me and introduced himself. He spoke English as badly as Spanish. But quite as eagerly. He took us into a large room and the furniture was uncomfortable.

"Visky?" He asked and the bottle was produced. We drank whisky and water and Anatilde said, no thank you, she didn't drink whisky. As he had no other spirits in the house she was offered nothing else. I don't think he was interested in women. Once the hand kissing was over he took no further interest in Anatilde. So I went and sat beside her and then I heard Derek say, "As my wife doesn't speak English shouldn't we speak Spanish?"

"Pardon," the German said and went on talking about farm matters, but in Spanish.

A gaunt woman opened a door and said that luncheon was served. We tripped into another room with a round table and a sideboard upon which there stood rows and rows of beer bottles. Anatilde said she didn't drink beer, and both the German and his female Landsknecht forgot to pour water into her glass. After the puchero and the farm business had been settled, the German decided to take notice of the rest of the company.

"You are," he said to me, "a wise young man. One

must come to a new country when one is still young. Such opportunities, such vistas, and," with a bow to Derek, "such a wonderful mentor to guide you in the beginning."

"He's my elder brother," Derek said quickly. "What Herr von Tuercke means, William, is that I'm older in experience here than you."

"I don't mind," I said.

"It isn't age but experience that counts among these savages," Herr von Tuercke said. "It will take you a long time to learn how to treat the natives. They're unscrupulous, uncultured, in fact, they're an unruly lot."

"Then why did you come to our country?" Anatilde asked.

She was furious. There was a light in her eyes I hadn't seen or imagined before. It was as if there had been a fire smouldering behind them, waiting eagerly for an opportunity to flare up. Now the opportunity had come. I was enraptured by her anger. I wished I had large cedar logs to feed that fire, and then I would hold my hands over the flames and let them scorch me.

"We Criollos," Anatilde went on, "didn't ask you to come here. If you eat our bread, respect our country."

"Steady," Derek said in English to nobody in particular.

The German had risen and his was the mien of an apologetic griffin. He tendered his excuses in no mean fashion. He waxed eloquent, but he wasn't ingenious. He said he had been referring to the lower orders, and even in his dreams it would never have occurred to him to think disparagingly of the honourable and respectable class to which Anatilde belonged. Derek was silent while Herr von Tuercke made his apologies. When he had finished and was waiting for Anatilde to speak, Derek cut in saying that he was quite sure that Anatilde accepted his excuses. Anatilde nodded and didn't speak for the rest of the meal. Most of the beer bottles remained unopened. The German forgot the incident and returned to Derek. They had one thing in common: their boundaries; and he hid behind them, so to speak, till it was time for us to leave. Anatilde and Derek walked in front of us to the car. Herr von Tuercke turned to me and

said, "Your sister-in-law is so charmante." He stopped and cocked his head sideways and the heraldic birds couldn't have been distant. "I don't know," he said sorrowfully, "why she doesn't like me."

Anatilde got quickly into the car and so he had no opportunity of smacking his lips on her hand. He shook my limp hand and closed both doors of the car, and none of us spoke till we were on the road again.

"You shouldn't have made that scene," Derek said to Anatilde.

"But he insulted my country," she said.

"He was in the wrong, but by losing your temper you put yourself in the wrong, too."

Anatilde burst into tears. Though it wasn't the time and the occasion for it, I couldn't resist leaning forward to see what she looked like with tears streaming down her cheeks. A little whimpering sound accompanied the tears, and since sophistication lived as far as she was concerned on a different planet, she cried with abandon. Her tears were her own and she was neither proud nor ashamed of them. My eyes took in her tears and they saw both corners of her lips turning down in mild despair and deep exasperation. The tears, I felt, would soon dry. A triumphant voice within me said: now you have seen her crying. I added her tears to my list. Smiling and laughing and her eyes shut, thoughtful and annoyed, angry and comparatively happy. Not really happy, for happiness would come only after our hour had struck. And there was that supreme facial expression that was still missing. Ah, but that could wait. It would come in its own unalterable time.

Meanwhile Derek had taken a large handkerchief from his pocket.

"I'm sorry you're upset," he said, and gave her the handkerchief.

She wiped her eyes dutifully as a child wipes its face after it has been reprimanded for having played in the garden.

When we reached the house I saw Don Francisco and the blacksmith standing outside the compound, waiting for us.

"We must talk to you," Don Francisco said to Derek.

We got out and Anatilde went off to the house and I remained with Derek, Don Francisco and the blacksmith. "Tell him what you told me," Don Francisco said to the blacksmith.

The blacksmith spat and his negroid lips remained wet with saliva. "It's Achaval," he said. "That's his right name, isn't it?"

"It is," Derek said.

"He's a useless lazy beggar. He has no desire to work, he absents himself most of the time and to-day he didn't turn up at all, but he lies in his bunk and says he feels indisposed and smokes and refuses to work. He's shamefully lazy. I can't use a man like that."

"You won't have to use him," Derek said and turned to me. "Come with me," he said.

I followed him to the bunkhouse, and as we went in Achaval sat up in bed and gave us a friendly welcoming smile. "Ah," he said in a sad voice, "it's nice of you chaps to come and ask after my health. I'm in a poor way."

By the time he finished his sentence Derek had reached the bunk.

"Get up," Derek said, "and leave the estancia at once."

Achaval looked pained and surprised. "Come, come," he said, "you can't blame me for being seedy."

"I told you to get up and get out."

"But I'm far from well."

"Look here," Derek said. "I know your type. You're useless, you're lazy, you're no damned good. I've had enough of you. Get up and clear out." He took the blanket and pulled it off. Achaval was wearing his trousers and waistcoat. "Get up," Derek thundered, and his face was pale with anger.

Achaval got up. He towered above Derek and for a moment I thought he would go for Derek. But he changed his mind. His suddenly limp hands showed that he had changed his mind.

"Okay," he said, and now he was the down-and-out cowhand in a free generous country. "Okay. You're the boss here. I'm going. Give me my wages. I tried hard. I

didn't want to let you down." The man from the cattle country was expecting a fair deal. I believe Achaval was a cinema fan and liked films about stampeding cattle and the sheriff shooting through the saloon door.

Derek took a ten-peso note from his pocket. "Take this and get out," he said.

"What about the money he owes in the stores?" I asked.

Achaval gave me a furious look. I didn't mind. I hadn't yet paid off the money I gave to the Spaniard that first morning in the stores; but that had been Anatilde's and my first secret.

"We'll see about it," Derek said. He turned to Achaval. "The lorry is going to Zapala in half an hour."

"I'll take a lift in that lorry," Achaval said not without dignity. He thought I would stay behind, but when he saw me leaving with Derek he called after me, "Laddie, can't you shake hands with a pal before he starts on a long journey?"

I hoped it would be a long journey. I went back to him and we shook hands.

"I don't think," he said shrewdly, "that you're going to tell your brother how large my bill is in the stores. Thank you for all your kindness." His voice quavered. "I feel, laddie, we'll never meet again." He held on to my hand. "Another ten pesos would be of great help to a departing friend."

"Go to hell," I said without any rancour, and went out of the bunkhouse.

I unlocked the stores and a peon came for cigarettes and paraffin, and then Anatilde came. David was with her.

"I don't feel like taking him for a long walk to-day," she said. She was still wearing the black coat and black dress.

"I hated that German," I said.

"But I don't think I should have cried," she said.

"But I wanted to see you crying. But only that once."

She sat down on the chair. David first sniffed then growled at a large tin, and then turned round in circles and eventually lay down and started to snore.

"I don't like people who hate my country," Anatilde said.

She lifted her head. "What do you think of my country?" she asked.

"I think one could be very unhappy here," I said.

"Is that all?"

"Oh no. I for one like it because I met you here."

"And I am a Criolla," she said, and I didn't know what to say, and anyway it was unnecessary to say anything.

"I feel cold, William," she said with an apologetic smile.

The brasero was empty. My overcoat was lying on the counter. I took it and put it round her shoulders. My patience with our to-morrows to come was almost exhausted, and after having put the coat round her shoulder, I rested my hand on the nape of her neck. It was exactly as I had imagined it. She sat there immobile, and my hand was just as immobile on the nape of her neck. Neither of us spoke and I thought I ought to move my hand, but it stayed put and her shoulder, the left shoulder, was touching the second button of my jacket. David snored loudly, though the rhythm of his snoring was a grand atonement.

"William," she said after a while, "I must go back."

My hand left the nape of her neck and she rose, and now she stood with her back to me. I put my hand into my pocket and took out a packet of cigarettes. I selected a cigarette, tapped it on the counter and then she turned round. Traces of her shed tears were still in her eyes. It had rained and the green expanse of sea near the Belgian dunes reflected the rain that had gone.

"William, you're cold, too," she said.

"Not really," I said.

"William, I'm going."

"Yes, go."

She called David and he woke up and stretched himself and got up slowly. I went to the door and stood there and as she passed, her left shoulder brushed against my right arm. I watched her walk away. I went back to the counter and picked up the cigarette. I smoked about five cigarettes and by then it was time for dinner, so I locked up.

There wasn't much talk at dinner. I was only aware of Anatlilde and I looked at her anxiously, afraid that she might

still be cold. She wasn't wearing her black dress any more but the red pullover, and because of the red pullover I didn't look at her too often lest Derek should realize before his time how things stood. Once she coughed and her bosom heaved as she coughed.

"I am very tired to-night," she said before she went out.

"That German is a tactless creature," Derek said. "But he's a good neighbour. I have much more trouble with my other neighbour, who is a Scotsman. He's the manager of the estancia. The owners live in England. He doesn't care a damn and lets the place run to seed."

"Is he the man who worked for you?"

"No. Mackenzie, Uncle Charles's manager, went South after we had our bust up." He rose. "What about a glass of brandy?"

The same old bottle was produced, and once again Derek examined the label which declared that the methylated spirit-like stuff came from Cognac. "Have you ever been to Cognac?" he asked.

"No," I said.

"Is Chambéry in Savoy?"

"Yes."

"You and Mary went there one summer."

I nodded. Probably we had sent him a post card from Chambéry too. "It's in Savoy. But we weren't in Chambéry; we stayed at Aix-les-Bains."

"I see," he said. "That, I suppose, was during the period Dominique used to let you go off alone?"

"You're very well informed. Did he write and tell you that?"

"I don't follow you."

"Did he write and tell you that he thought it would help if Mary and I went away without him during my holidays?"

"I don't believe he did." I knew he was lying. "Anyway, Mary used to write to me. You sent me a post card from Chambéry. It must be a pretty place."

"It is," I said. "Did Dominique often write to you?"

"But my dear William, we hardly knew one another." He smiled at me. It was a bland smile.

"You met three times," I said.

"There you are. But I did like that post card you sent from Chambéry. It must be a quiet out of the way place."

"It is in a way. I was fascinated by it. It's quite near to Aix-les-Bains and there is a good bus service. I used to go over every day. Do you know why? But if I told you you'd laugh."

"No."

"It's rather silly and romantic." I drank some methylated spirit. "I must tell you about it. At the corner of a square there was a stationery shop. I went in there the first time by accident. I think I wanted a nib or something. That shop had a very queer effect on me. I returned to it every day like a believer to a shrine." I wished I had expressed myself in a less hackneyed manner. "The square was one of those cobbled French provincial squares still sleeping in the seventeenth century. The stationery shop was in a shadowy corner. It had a brown wooden door. The shop was small and cool. There was a window beside the door and because it was a higgledy-piggledy little place, if one looked through the window the cobbles were the first thing one saw. And a bec de gaz. I nearly forgot the bec de gaz. But one had to look up to see the bec de gaz."

Derek was listening avidly. "There was a long brown counter and there were always a few flies about." Derek nodded. "Boxes containing notepaper were on a shelf. But there weren't many boxes. That shelf was brown too. Beside the door was a display of picture post cards. Views of Chambéry and some of those coloured ones with a young soldier, a flowering bush, and a girl, and some facetious inscription. Then a large metal jar containing pens of various colours. Whenever the door opened a little bell rang. It was a very unobtrusive bell." Derek nodded again. "An old man with a huge imperiale came from the back room to serve me." I finished my drink. "That shop was the most peaceful place I ever saw in my life. I used to pop in there as often as I could. But I also liked standing in the square

and looking at the brown door and slanting window, and simply basked in all that peace and calm. The old man was short and fat, and I wanted to talk to him and ask him how many years he had been there and so on. But every time I went in I realized it was unnecessary. So I bought another nib."

Derek lit a cigarette and said, "You see that's exactly what I believe in. That little man of yours had built up his own life in his little shop, and didn't let anybody interfere with it. At the same time, I imagine, he didn't interfere with others and that's why it was so peaceful. That little shop bears out my argument. I'm doing the same; but with me it isn't nibs and post cards, but my estancia and my sheep."

"My impression was that there was such peace because the little man and the little shop got on well together. They seemed like lovers to me."

"Sounds rather far-fetched to me," he said. "Your trouble is that you try to look at everything from a sentimental point of view. One must be rational and efficient and leave sentimentality to . . ." He made a curious movement with his right hand.

"To whom?" I asked.

"To the failures of life."

"And who are the failures of life?"

"I'll tell you that some other time."

"I suppose you're referring to me?" I said, lighting a cigarette. "I don't mind."

"I wish," he said, getting up, "that I could teach you to listen to reason. But I don't want to start a quarrel. Good-night. It's time to go to bed."

"But what has reason to do with that shop in Chambéry?"

He went out and I heard, his footsteps in the hall, and then the door of his office opened and then it closed. So he didn't go up to bed.

When I reached the landing I stopped outside their door and knocked on it. I waited and Anátilde came to the door and opened it. She was wearing a simple dark dressing-gown, and though it wasn't monkish it was simplicity itself.

"William?" she said.

"I just wanted to say good night to you."

She lifted her eyes which until then had been at the level of my tie. "Good night," she said. I went to my room.

Soon we wouldn't have to say good night to each other any more. I noticed that the silver frame was even in a more filthy condition. I had been ashamed to ask the slovenly maid how one cleaned silver. But to-morrow I must. I heard a noise in the hallway and the mouse-like sounds of zapatillos moving about. Voices followed. Derek was talking to somebody and then the front door opened, and shortly after Derek came up the stairs. He didn't stop at his door but came on to mine and knocked on it, and I said come in. His face was pale. My first thought was that he was frightened. But I knew I was wrong because it wasn't his habit to be frightened.

"Anatilde's brother is coming here the day after to-morrow," he said.

"Really?" I said, in an excited voice. "How very interesting. What is he like?"

"He's a pest," Derek said, and added with praiseworthy simplicity, "I hate the sight of him."

"Why?" I hadn't before seen Derek in such a state.

"He is stupid, bad-mannered, vain and," I was expecting that, "no damned good." He lowered his voice. "But she adores him. She thinks he's wonderful."

"Why is he coming here?"

"He's coming on business. His father has acquired the sole agency of some make of cheap cigarettes for the Territory of Neuquen. So that is a good excuse for him to come here. Curse him."

"Aren't you prejudiced?" I asked. "Husbands are usually prejudiced against their wives' relatives."

"You should know," he said in a voice I disliked.

"Don't be irrational," I said. "Leave anger and dislike to failures like me."

"For God's sake don't start quarrelling. You rub me up the wrong way at times and that's all."

"Probably I'm as intolerant as you."

"I'm not intolerant," he said mechanically. He wasn't interested.

"Look here, William, will you do me a favour?"

"What is it?"

"Would you go the day after to-morrow to Zapala and collect that bounder? The less I see of him the better for all concerned."

"All right," I said, "I don't see why I shouldn't." Probably, I thought, I was going to like him.

Derek seemed relieved. "You said I'm intolerant," he said. "I have a good mind to prove to you that I'm not. But that can wait."

"You're very mysterious."

"We'll talk about that some other time." He eyed me with sardonic amusement. "Thank you for promising to help me. Now I'd better go and tell her that her brother is coming here. Thank God he'll only stay the night."

He wished me good night and went from the room. I took out my handkerchief and tried to clean the silver frame with it. But apparently the handkerchief was a failure too.

TEN

Next morning made its entrance into the world with a lot of revolver shots. The Turco had been drinking the whole night and by the time the sun came up he had made his mind up, and had found a way out for his anguish and longing. That at least was the explanation he gave later on. Since he had become a sort of bachelor again, he slept in the bunkhouse from which Achaval had been ejected the evening before. The other peons concurred that he rose with blood-shot eyes, and an empty bottle was

lying beside his bunk. His countenance was ferocious and menacing. As he hadn't undressed last night he hadn't to spend much time on his toilette. He put on his dusty sombrero which he usually wore on Sundays or when showing off to women, and started towards the little valley where the blacksmith lived with his erstwhile sweetheart the large fleshy Marguerita. Because the sun was shining and because he had been drinking the entire night, he fired several shots in the air long before he reached the little valley. He tumbled down the escarpment and charged the house in which Marguerita resided. The blacksmith was already at the forge and he found Marguerita alone. He grabbed her and that, according to the witnesses, was no mean feat. He took her to a hut on the edge of the valley. They had lived there before he had passed her on to the blacksmith. A couple of men watched their progress from hut to hut, and when they related that to Derek they laughed with gusto.

"You ought to have seen her," one of them said. "She looked like *la gran puta* herself. She screamed and laughed and her black hair was all over her face, and she was only half-dressed and he held on to her, and now he has locked himself up with her in that hut and if anybody approaches he fires his revolver."

"They must be pretty cold in there," a peon said.

"No," said another peon. "With a woman like Marguerita, I'm sure he doesn't feel the cold."

Don Francisco spat. "You're quite right," he said.

"I wouldn't mind being in the Turco's place for half an hour," the Spanish cook said, and they all laughed. I had seldom heard so much laughing and so many *gran putas* and the spitting was on a large scale, too.

"Where is the blacksmith?" Derek asked. He wasn't laughing. Somebody ran off to get the blacksmith. "What have you to say?" Derek asked the blacksmith who arrived panting.

"I'll wait till he's spent his ammunition and then I'll go and kill him," said the blacksmith.

"You'll do what I tell you," Derek said.

"He took my woman," the blacksmith said.

That moment we heard another shot. "He's only boasting," said Don Francisco.

"I'll stop him," the blacksmith said.

"You'll stay here," Derek said. "If the woman wants to stay with you I'll see to it that the Turco gives her back. But if there's any more trouble I'll get rid of you too. You understand me?"

"Yes," said the blacksmith in an unconvinced voice.

"If you don't obey me I'll get the police in," said Derek.

"We don't want the police," they said in a chorus. The police were unpopular. I had heard people say that they preferred brigands to the police.

"I'll leave it to you," said the blacksmith, and I knew he'd go for the Turco at the first opportunity.

"I'm going to the Turco," said Derek, "and I'll speak to him."

"I'm coming with you," said Don Francisco.

"I'll go alone," said Derek. "He won't fire at me."

"But he is drunk."

"Never mind."

Derek started off towards the valley, swinging his cane and walking erect, though not more erect than normally. Later in the day, in fact at night, when I lay with my head bashed in, it seemed to me that it would have been a wonderful way out for all of us if the Turco had killed Derek. But as he walked away from us I didn't think of that. Instead I ran after him and caught up with him as he went out through the outer gate. "You shouldn't come," he said.

"I don't see why I shouldn't."

"He might start shooting at us."

"Who cares?"

I gave him a cigarette and we lit up, and then we went to the valley. The Turco was at the window. The glass was cracked and his head behind the glass seemed out of proportion.

"It's all right," Derek said. "He knows it's me."

We approached and the Turco opened the window, and some broken glass clattered to the ground.

"Don Derek," he shouted, "don't come here."

"I want to talk to you," Derek said.

"If you come here I'll shoot you."

"Put that revolver away. I don't want to do you any harm." The Turco fired a shot in the air. "If you come nearer, Don Derek, I'm going to shoot you." He fired another shot. I didn't like that at all, but Derek didn't appear to mind.

"What's the matter with you?" Derek asked. "Come out and talk to me. You know you can trust me."

"But I've got the Marguerita here and she'll stay here."

"That depends on her. Let me speak to her."

"No, you won't speak to her," shouted the Turco.

"Look here," said Derek, "if she wants to stay with you that's her business. But you must stop this mad behaviour of yours. I am not interested in your private affairs. I want my men to behave themselves." He was getting impatient. Nevertheless, I admired him very much down there in the valley.

The Turco shook his head. "You can speak to us from this distance," he said.

"Come out," said Derek. He rapped that out like a command.

It had an immediate effect. "I have nothing against you, Don Derek," the Turco said. "Come to the window and speak to me here."

"Come out," Derek thundered.

The Turco left the window. "He'll barricade himself in the inner room or something," I said. The door opened and the Turco came out.

"Well done," I said. If only he understood his wife as well as he understood his men. "Well done," I said again.

The Turco came out and locked the door of the hut. Then he advanced sheepishly, afraid of a trap. "Here I am," he said. He looked round.

"Do you want a cigarette?" Derek asked. The Turco's eyes lit up.

"I wanted a cigarette for some time," he said.

Derek gave him a cigarette. "Give me your gun," he said.

"I can't," the Turco said. "I'm a foreigner and I don't

know how to handle a knife. If I give you this gun the blacksmith will come and kill me."

"Give me that gun and I'll see to it that the blacksmith keeps away from you."

The Turco was smoking hungrily. His eyes were on the door of the hut. With a sudden visible impulse he gave the revolver to Derek.

"I know I can trust you," he said.

"Let me see the woman," Derek said.

The Turco went to the door and unlocked it. "She wants to stay with me," he said.

"That depends on her," said Derek.

Marguerita was sitting on a low bench. It was almost lost underneath her bulk.

"Eh, Don Derek," she said, "the trouble this madman causes." Affectionately she looked at the Turco. "You can't live without me you old scoundrel, eh?"

"I wish I had a drink," the Turco said. "Get me a drink, Don Derek."

Derek didn't deign to answer.

"I'll get you a drink," the woman said obscenely. "But some other time."

"I gave him the revolver," the Turco said.

"You coward," she said, "I bet you're glad to be rid of it."

He gave her a happy smile and came and stood beside her.

"Now, woman," Derek said, "what is it you intend to do?"

"I am going to stay with him," she said, "and next time he tries to get rid of me, I'll plant a knife into his chest, and I'm not a cowardly gringo like him, and I know how to use a knife."

She meant it. The Turco nodded contentedly.

"All right," Derek said. "You'll both stay in this hut and tomorrow you'll both leave the estancia. I have had enough trouble with you. You have saved some money and because you worked well I'll make you a present of fifty pesos before you leave. Stay in here and I'll see to it that the blacksmith leaves you alone."

"Must I really go away?" the Turco asked.

"Yes," said Derek, "and you can thank her for that." He turned to Marguerita. "If you ever dare to set foot on the estancia again you'll see what will happen to you. You were the curse of this place. If I had my way women like you would be destroyed like mad dogs." He was livid with rage.

"Is that so?" Marguerita said. "You know nothing about women and I don't care what you say." She put her tongue out at him. Then she called him many dirty names.

"Come on," I said to Derek and he came at once.

We climbed back to the ridge, and Marguerita who had come to the door was still hurling insults at him.

"What an awful woman," I said. "But Derek, you behaved marvellously."

He said nothing till we reached the top of the ridge. There he exploded. "To think of it," he said, "that I must lose one of my best men because of a woman like that. I wish to God there were no women in the world."

"Do you really mean that?" I said, but he wasn't listening to me.

"There ought to be a law against such creatures," he said as we reached the outer gate. That reminded me that Mr. Edmett wanted him to become a barrister. Don Francisco was waiting for us, and when Don Francisco complimented him on his excellent handling of the situation he cheered up.

The blacksmith was furious. After breakfast I went to talk to him. I asked him why he was so upset about it. He should be, I said, glad to be rid of her.

"If you had ever lived with her you wouldn't speak like that," he said. "So they're going away to-morrow? The world isn't very large, I can't do anything here because Don Derek won't let me, but I shall come across him some day and I can promise you that he'll get a knife wound for every night he has spent with her."

"And what about the woman?"

"I'll bring her back even if I have to drag her by that long black hair of hers."

Towards noon, however, the blacksmith must have decided

that he couldn't wait for the future, and left the smithy and started off towards the valley. He found that Don Francisco and another man were following him, for Derek left nothing to chance. A little later Derek came to the stores. "It's no good," he said. "We can't leave them here till tomorrow. The blacksmith is as clever as a monkey and he'll try again, and I feel responsible because I took the Turco's gun away. Besides, the sooner that woman goes the better. I'm afraid you'll have to take them to Zapala. That'll mean two trips. One today and one tomorrow. Today's trip will be more amusing." He smiled wryly. "I wish that man weren't coming tomorrow."

"Why shouldn't I spend the night in Zapala and come back with the brother tomorrow?"

"As you like it," Derek said; and I thought that a night away from Anatilde would be a good opportunity to work it all out in my mind. For if I didn't look out and wasn't ready I might, when our hour came, easily be left behind.

"Somebody walking on your grave?" Derek asked.

"Oh no. It's cold in here."

Luncheon was usually a quick affair but to-day it seemed longer to me because Anatilde was there beside me and I wouldn't see her for twenty-four hours.

"William," she had said as we went into the dining-room, "my brother is coming. You will like him. I know you will."

We talked mostly of the Turco and the woman, and I couldn't even be bothered to listen to my own words. Twenty-four hours, my mind said continuously, twenty-four hours.

I went to my room and packed a small suit-case, and as I came out there she was on the landing.

"You are going to Zapala," she said. She was stating a sad fact.

"Yes," I said.

"I am taking David to the pool this afternoon," she said.

"I will see you to-morrow," I said.

"Do you want me to sing for you this afternoon?"

"Yes, please," I said. She went to her room and I went

down the stairs. The suit-case, that symbol of twenty-four hours' absence, was suddenly heavy.

Derek had got the car out of the garage. "You'd better have it filled at Zapala," he said.

Then a curious procession arrived. The Turco with a small seaman's chest on his shoulder, all dressed in his Sunday best. His sombrero was brushed and his rubicund face was tired and pale. Marguerita walked beside him, and he was a dwarf compared to her. She carried a wicker basket. That was her luggage. They came to the car and the Turco was proud yet slightly sheepish. Derek gave him the money he had put aside these last three years and added fifty pesos to it, and the Turco embarked on a long speech in order to thank him.

"Don't waste your breath on him," she said, pointing rudely at Derek. "You'll never see him again." That confused the Turco.

"Que le vaya bien," he stammered.

"Que le vaya bien," Derek said, and glared at the woman. I was afraid that she would start off again. But she said nothing. She smiled broadly and returned Derek's stare. She could have kept that up for hours. When Derek looked away, she shrugged her shoulders and climbed into the car. She settled down on the back seat, and that very moment the blacksmith appeared. He came running and he was brandishing his knife.

"Put a," he shrieked and the Turco, subdued and chiefly thirsting for a drink, turned to Derek for protection. Don Francisco and a couple of men tripped the blacksmith over and Honorio the largest peon of them all, sat on his chest.

"Take them away," Derek called to me. I got into the car and we simply shot out through the gate. The blacksmith was sobbing and cursing hysterically. I remembered that I had forgotten to ask Derek for a description of his brother-in-law. Anyway, it was now too late.

Marguerita and the Turco sat on the back seat and I couldn't resist glancing back. She was looking out through the back window. A little later she laughed. It came from the very depth of her and somehow reminded me of French military

drums. We reached the main road, and as we drove along, I wondered in what frame of mind I would be returning to-morrow. But there was before me the whole night to think it out and work it out, and so I slowed down and asked the Turco whether he wanted a smoke.

"Very much," he said, and they both said that they had forgotten to buy cigarettes before they left the estancia.

"We packed too quickly," Marguerita said and laughed.

I gave him a cigarette and wilfully ignored the woman.

"Give me one," she said. I turned my back on her. She grabbed my shoulder with her large hand. "Come on, muchacho, give me a cigarette." She let go of my shoulder and put her fleshy hand on my cheek. Her fingers began to caress my cheek and then gently, surprisingly gently for such large fingers, pulled my ear.

"All right, here you are," I said. She leaned forward for the cigarette. "I'd have you running after me like the rest of them," she laughed, "but I don't want you." She turned back to the Turco.

"I only want you, you cowardly gringo."

"I won't let you go again," the Turco said.

"You hear him?" she asked. "I'll go wherever I want to go and when I want to go."

The Turco didn't dare to answer. I for one was glad when the electric pylons, like a waiting row of sentries, appeared; soon after that Zapala came into sight.

"Where shall I drop you?" I asked without looking back.

"There is a hotel," the Turco said, "which is called the Hotel Universal. I'm told that it's the poshest hotel in Zapala. We'll spend the night there."

"A stable would suit you better," she said, but her voice sounded pleased.

"It's expensive," I said, because I didn't want to stay under the same roof with them.

"There is money in my pocket," the Turco said. "You will," he added, "take a drink with us."

We arrived at the Hotel Universal which, on account of the early hour, was deserted. Life wouldn't begin before dinner-time. With much difficulty I found the proprietress and

asked for a room, and then the Turco asked for one, and we were put into adjoining rooms, and the rooms opened on to the backyard which had a well in the middle. I had a look at my room and when I came out and went through the bar in order to go out, I found the Turco and Marguerita already there.

"A drink," said the Turco. "A whisky," he added. "You people always drink whisky." He called for a bottle of whisky and poured a generous quantity into my glass.

"You'll make me drunk," I said.

"Getting drunk would make a man of you," Marguerita said. She laughed. "The trouble with you señorito is that you're afraid of women. One can see that at a first glance." She slapped my knee. "I could teach you a few tricks if I felt like it." The drink had revived the Turco's spirits. "If," he said to me, "you hadn't been so quick in getting us away I'd have killed that blacksmith."

"You hero," Marguerita said. "One more drink and you'll say that you were the only man in my life." She threw her head back and laughed, and I said that I had an appointment with the mayor and would they have a drink on me while I was gone. "I'll drink one for you, too," Marguerita said, the process of throwing her head back was repeated. Her neck was white and surprisingly young.

I went out and the clouds were near, but the wind was changing and would blow them away. I stopped and lit a cigarette and a few sheep were ambling along the main road, sedately and gloriously unaware of their own stupidity. A daddy long legs of a mongrel trotted behind the sheep.

"Buenas tardes," said a voice and there was Don Martin coming towards me. "Don Derek's brother," he said. "I recognized you at once." He stopped. "How is your brother?"

I said my brother was very well. He asked me what I was doing in Zapala, and I told him that I'd come to collect my sister-in-law's brother.

"When I caught sight of you," Don Martin said, "I said to myself that Don Derek's brother has had enough of our great country and intends to return to Europe."

I smiled since I couldn't have given him an answer either one way or the other. We stood there talking for a while. A mule went past like an old man walking with a stick. I asked Don Martin if there was another eating place besides the Hotel Universal. "There is the fonda on the other side of the railway line," he said. "But it's a dirty place and I wouldn't recommend it."

It seemed to me that even a dirty place would be preferable to the company of Marguerita, which would be thrust on me the moment I entered the hotel. "We'll see each other to-morrow," Don Martin said. He walked away and his short sturdy figure moved resolutely towards his house.

I returned to the hotel, but instead of going through the front entrance I went through the backyard, and passing the door of the bar, I beheld the Turco and the woman drinking copiously. He appeared to have recovered from his hang-over, and if the revolver had still been with him I'm sure he would have fired a few shots as a salute to the return of his courage. I spent about half an hour in my room.

Anatilde and the future were on the edge of my thoughts. They would have come at the slightest encouragement, but I kept them back: tonight I would have it all out with myself. I put on my overcoat: it was getting cold. As I went out and passed the Turco's room the open door revealed the sailor's chest and the wicker basket. The wicker basket was on top of the sailor's chest. I left through the courtyard and the evening was coming on in deep drafts; by the time I had crossed the railway it was completely dark.

The station was like dead. Not a sound and nothing moved. A couple of trucks stood on a siding and they seemed lost and were objects of pity. I looked in the direction where the rails ended. But it was too dark to see the end of the line. I found the fonda without undue difficulty and as I opened the door, I knew at once that I wouldn't like it. It was a long low room with the noisy posters of liqueur manufacturers on the walls. A few tables with dirty wine-stained cloths, and a long sideboard of heavy execrable taste with a gramophone on it peeped at me through the din and the smoke. The gramophone was playing a record that

related about a dozen jokes. They played that record about ten times while I was in there. The same people guffawed at the jokes ten times running. There were a few Indians about and one of them was drunk. His face was hopelessly childlike and his being drunk wasn't offensive, but somehow sacrilegious. There was one honest to God peon in a corner, but he left soon after I came in. The rest of the clients, provided I could trust my eyes in the thick smoke, were a bunch of lorry drivers and railway men.

A hush fell on the room as I came in and I could distinctly hear the gramophone asking how many people there were in a matrimonial bed. (The answer is fourteen: Alfonso trece, y su señora catorce.) Peals of laughter followed. An elderly anæmic woman and a youngish man with a baby girl's face stood behind the counter. I asked for dinner and the woman said there was soup and puchero and steak. I sat down at the first table which was nearest to the door.

"Hullo, laddie," said Achaval, whom I hadn't noticed when I came in.

"Oh, hullo," I said.

He sat down and his face was tired and loomed larger than usual.

"I arrived here an hour ago," he said. "I was lucky, I got a lift, otherwise I wouldn't have been here tonight."

"But the lorry brought you down last night," I said.

"I wasn't speaking of last night," he said. "I went for a walk this morning. Anyway, that has nothing to do with you."

I looked up. Something had changed about him. As I couldn't discover the change, it occurred to me that it was our relationship that had changed; or perhaps finished.

"I walked ten miles," he said.

"Ten miles aren't such a lot," I said.

"Is that so?" He sat down. He pushed me and my chair a little aside as he sat down. "How many miles did you walk?"

"That doesn't enter into it," I said, and wished I hadn't come to the fonda.

"You seem to be very cocky tonight, my man," he said.

The woman came with the soup and he told her to bring him a plate of soup, too. The girlish young man was watching us from behind the counter.

"You'll pay for my dinner," Achaval said.

"I don't mind if I do."

"Because if you don't I'll knock you right down."

I smiled a sickly smile. The woman came with a second plate of soup. "I want a hundred pesos from you," Achaval said.

"You're talking rubbish," I said, trying to look gay and jovial.

"Give me a hundred pesos," Achaval said.

I didn't answer. I hoped that would help. Of course it didn't help.

"You think you're clever," Achaval went on. "If you don't give me that money I'll beat the life out of you, you miserable rat. Because your brother owns an estancia which by rights belongs to us, do you think that you can treat a Criollo like that?" He took my plate of soup and emptied it on the floor. There was a queer look in his eyes. That look said: you are surprised? Wait, there are bigger surprises in store for you.

The gramophone was telling a joke about a mother-in-law who died, and the peon fled because he was afraid that the stingy estanciero would feed him on the mother-in-law. I stared at the dirty table-cloth and was mortally ashamed of myself for not having the pluck to hit him.

"I haven't got a hundred pesos on me," I said. "I don't know what is the matter with you?" I almost added that I had been a good friend to him.

"I'll teach you, you son of a bitch," he said. "You haven't got a hundred pesos on you, eh? You think I don't know that you're mucking about with your brother's wife? She is a low prostitute and you're just a son of a bitch."

With a certain amount of relish I threw all caution to the wind.

"You dirty, disgusting tramp," I said, and my voice was hoarse and it trembled. "Come outside and I'll show you where you get off. You may be Dempsey's sparring partner,"

I faltered, "but I'll jolly well show you where you get off." I stood up and my knees trembled to keep company with my voice.

Achaval rose at once. "That's better," he said in a calm voice. "Give me a hundred pesos and I'll take back everything I said."

"Come outside," I was shouting, and I trembled no more.

"You asked for it, you son of a bitch." He said something to the company at large and the company laughed, but my ears had gone deaf and I couldn't understand his words. Far away the gramophone was saying *trece*, and when I opened the door it said *catorce*. He went out through the door before me, and I followed him and almost fell over the stones with which the road was littered. "Let's go a little further on," he said as I stopped. His voice was quite affable.

Now and then in the past I had heard people making offers to go outside. Those offers were usually made in Paris night clubs, mostly with American accents. The recipients of the offers declined more often than not. Now it had happened to me and it was I who had made the offer. There was some moonlight in a rift in the clouds; and there was no getting away from it that Achaval would knock me down like ninepins. He was a boxer: I wasn't; and he weighed about five stones more than I. But I had become much calmer and tried to make a plan. I must hit first, and hit with all my limited might and then hope for the best. Achaval bent down and with my thoughts concentrated on my plan of attack, I walked on but I saw his shadow straighten itself.

"Here we are," he said from behind. He brought his right hand forward and it held a stone he had just picked up. It happened far too quickly. He hit me on the head from behind with the sharp stone and I went down at once, and before I passed out I felt the blood shooting into my eyes.

I came round because it was cold. It was brutally cold, and the cold was like a mass of stones and it lay on my chest, and my legs had ceased to exist. I wanted to move but my head-wound said an emphatic no. So I lay quietly and waited for my head to be off guard and then, I decided, I would

make a dash for it. The stars were vivid in the dark blue sky. They seemed to shine through the clouds and, of course, the clouds were covering the dark blue of the sky too. Nevertheless I saw the sky and the stars; and even the moon that had gone off to India. As my face was covered with blood I saw them through a haze of blood, and I must confess the sky, stars and moon looked very pretty like that. Don't move, said my wound. All right I said, and whispered to myself that my chance would soon come. But it didn't come for some time.

So Achaval had knocked me down with a stone and had hit me from behind, and that, according to all rules and conventions, was a dastardly act. It was yellow and it was cowardly, and it wasn't cricket. Not cricket! I had never played cricket and therefore it was clever of me to know what was and what wasn't cricket. Derek had played cricket, but on the other hand Derek was married to Anatilde. I wasn't. Under the blood-covered stars I knew that I wasn't married to Anatilde; and I knew, too, that it wasn't cricket to hit a man with a stone from behind. Taking everything into consideration it seemed to me that I knew a considerable amount. And, in order to show off my profound knowledge, I added for the benefit of my head that I was the brother of one Mary who had died and whom I loved more than anybody in the world. She had had a husband, Dominique, who was a fool in more ways than one. But an admirable, unhappy fool. I was proud of myself: I was going from strength to strength: nobody could compete with my knowledge. I passed out again.

When I came round for the second time there was no nonsense left in me. The sky, the moon and the stars had gone and the clouds were alone, listening to the barking of a dog on the other side of the rails. The world seemed quite dead, yet my mind worked quickly, precisely like those chronometers I used to see in the window of Leroy in the rue du Faubourg de Saint Honoré. Achaval was stronger than I. He could have had no doubts as to the outcome of the fight. Yet he hadn't the courage to take the feeble punishment he might have got from me. So without the slightest qualm,

against all preconceived rules of decent behaviour, he had knocked me down from behind. And there, I realized with scientific insight, lay all my troubles.

I had always had qualms and had never dared to be really bad. Achaval hadn't any qualms. Hence he was now drinking in the fonda and I was shivering in the open with my head bashed in. Life had given me pain from the very start. Ask my mother, I said to my throbbing wound, ask my mother. Life had taken away Mary, and it had given me pain and misery; and then more pain and more misery. Life had been like Achaval to me and had hit me from behind with a stone, without giving me a chance to fight and to defend myself. It had robbed me of Mary and had kept me in uninteresting jobs, and never an opportunity to do better for myself. I moved my head, and I had to close my eyes because the wound had begun to bleed again and blood was trickling into my eyes again. I closed them and could distinctly hear a chronometer and my thoughts ticked with it. Now, finally, with the bestial cunning of one who hits with stones from behind, life has sent Anatilde to me. But, oh, she was my devoted brother's wife and, ah, it wasn't done to rob your brother of his wife. No, you must go on in despair, eating your heart out and perishing of desire, because it isn't done to take unto yourself the woman you loved if she was your dear brother's wife; and the fact that she wasn't happy with him didn't even enter into it. But it was done, most efficiently done, to hit you from behind and such an attack is praiseworthy because it is bound to be successful. One doesn't risk defeat if one hits from behind.

With a sudden jerk I sat up and then staggered to my feet. First I thought I would collapse, but I steadied myself somehow or other and started to walk slowly towards the rails. Now and then I believed that my head would fly away, make a round flight, and come to roost on my neck again. Some birds do that with their nests.

I found my cigarettes and stopped to light one. It was good to smoke again. I would take Anatilde away. There in my bank in London were the hundred pounds left out of Mr. Edmett's legacy which I had kept for an emergency.

The emergency was here. I had found myself and I was jubilant at the thought. From now on I would administer the stone from behind. It would be my turn to drink in fondas while my human brothers lay bleeding in the cold. And Derek? I wouldn't care a rap. No, not a rap. I want Anatlde and I will have Anatlde by hook or crook, and life has just taught me that it must chiefly be by crook. My plans? I smiled. They would come in their time, but time was no longer a chimera: it was tomorrow. I began to walk faster because Anatlde would soon be mine. I shall have happiness and let others receive stones on their skulls. Poor Derek. No, there was only poor me. But in the past. In the future there would be rich me, happy me and victorious me. I crossed the rails and had to stop for a moment. My head wished to make an excursion in the ether. I counted till ten and then I walked on, but somewhat slower. I wanted to look at my watch and saw that it had gone. I put my hand into my coat-pocket and the twenty pesos which had been in there had also gone. I regretted the watch, for it had been Mary's present to me, but in a sense I was glad that Achaval had done his dirty work so thoroughly. What an example to follow. I found my passport safe in my breast-pocket, and I was a little disappointed that he hadn't taken that too. Or my tie. It was a pity that he had left me my tie. It would have pleased and given more power to my elbow if he had stripped me altogether. That made me think of my overcoat. That was in the fonda. Probably he had taken it to pay for his drinks. I almost said: good old Achaval. Anyway, both Anatlde and I would be grateful to him for ever.

I had reached the Hotel Universal. I went through the backyard and switched on the light in my room. I took my washing things from my suit-case and started for the well.

"Who's that?" Marguerita's sleepy voice said. I mumbled something. "Oh, it's the señor," she said. The Turco was snoring and another man was snoring in the room beside theirs.

I pumped up some water, and then soaked my sponge in the water and applied the wet sponge to my wound. I thought for a moment that my head would explode like a bomb. I was

giddy, but tried again and it just wouldn't work. The wound was bleeding again.

"Marguerita," I called, "could you come here for a moment?"

She heard me at once. "Are you in trouble?" she asked. Poor people often begin with that question.

"I hurt myself a little," I said. The light went on in her room, and she opened the door, and I could see her coarse nightgown and her large breasts rebellious behind the white cotton chemise. She put on a coat and came out. The light made a shaft that embraced the well. Thus she saw me clearly.

"Mary and Joseph," she exclaimed, "but you have been murdered."

"Come, come," I said. "Some swine hit me with a stone." And I made another attempt to raise the sponge to my wound.

"You'll kill yourself like that," she said and took the sponge from me. "Go to your room and I'll bring some water and I'll fix you up."

"Thank you," I said. She stood there like a large tree and it must be soothing in its shade. I went to my room and sat down on my bed. She came with a basin full of water. She put the basin on the table.

"Have you a towel?" she asked. I pointed to my suitcase and she opened the suit-case and looked at a shirt and a towel and a pair of pyjamas. "What fine things these are," she said and there was no envy in her voice. She washed my wound, and while she washed it, I could smell her breath which was strong with whisky. "Put your head against my breast and don't move," she said.

So I put my head against her breast, and through her coarse chemise I could hear her heart beat. It was loud and regular. She tore the towel in two with her large brown hands and made a workable bandage. Her black hair fell in masses all around her. She went to her room and came back with a triumphant smile. "A safety-pin," she said. "I always fasten my petticoat with it."

The bandage was set on the clean wound, and I felt better though cold and sleepy.

"You were knocked about barbarously," she said. "What scoundrels there are. A man like you. You wouldn't harm a fly." You wait, my tired mind said. "Now I'll help you to undress," she said. "Come on, don't be ashamed. I've seen plenty of men undressing." She stood there with folded arms while I took my clothes off. When I had pulled my shirt off she looked at my chest and smiled.

"You're too thin," she said. "You ought to put on more flesh." I put on my pyjamas and got into bed, and I started to shiver and the noise of my chattering teeth was almost deafening. "You're cold," she said. She touched my hand. "You're like ice," she said. "I think I'd better get in with you. You'll freeze to death alone." She went and shut the door and put out the light, and then her heavy body got in beside me and the bed creaked under her weight. "Put your head here on my shoulder," she said. "But careful. Don't let that wound start bleeding again." I did as she bade me. "Now close your eyes. La Marguerita will keep you warm."

Slowly, like dancing slippers on tiptoes, warmth and sleep came to me. Marguerita lay there immobile and I rolled into sleep.

ELEVEN

I woke up with the sun streaming through the half-open door. Marguerita had gone. I wasn't surprised at that. My head hurt less than I should have expected. I got out of bed and looked at my wrist which, of course, was innocent of my stolen watch. I washed, shaved and dressed and then I had to sit down because I was giddy. But the giddiness was just an afterthought of the pain of the night before. As I went out I looked at Marguerita's door and it

was closed, and the Turco's snores were the same as when I had come in. I knocked on the door and her voice floated out bawdy and inimical.

"Go to the devil," she shouted.

"It's me," I said. "I want to thank you for . . ."

"Go to the devil. I want to sleep."

I entered the bar and the clock said it was eight o'clock. The maidservant was abroad and I asked her for coffee, and the coffee was strong and I drank it without milk. I poured some rum into my second cup. Afterwards I walked down to the fonda. It was a breezy spring day, as though spring had decided to enter this part of the world after all. I walked towards the railway and I remembered that I had at last made up my mind. Today, or at latest to-morrow, Anatilde would leave Derek. That was a fact like the pylons and the pair of rails stopping so suddenly on the other side of the station. I touched my bandage which was a further proof that there were no more qualms, no frightened conscience, and that I didn't care tuppence for Derek's feelings.

The door of the fonda was open, and as I went in I saw my coat hanging in the corner exactly where I had left it. The young man came up to me.

"Why didn't you pay for your dinner last night? We'll keep your coat till you pay."

He made a movement with his hand as if to hold on to the coat. I grabbed his arm and it surprised me how much stronger I was than he.

"One more word from you," I said, "and I'll beat the hell out of you. Give me my coat."

He was dumbfounded. "But you owe me two dinners," he said.

"Two dinners? You dare to ask for the price of two dinners and watch your guests being assaulted? Give me that coat."

He muttered something about not wishing to have trouble, and took my overcoat off the peg and gave it to me. "Who will pay for the dinners?" he asked.

"The man who attacked me. And then you can laugh again as you laughed last night."

"But I didn't laugh."

That probably was quite true. "Hold your filthy tongue," I said and walked out of the fonda. I wanted to sing, for I had mastered the world and Anatilde would be mine.

Marguerita's door was still closed and I didn't want to wake her again. But I hoped she had slept well while she had been in my bed. I went to Don Martin who was already up and in his office. I told him what had happened, and he shook his head and said I was lucky that Achaval hadn't killed me.

"It is better," he said, "to go about with a broken head than not to go about at all."

He whistled for a short while. "He is a bad muchacho. But what could I do? Our great country is much too large for us to find him." He said that not without pride.

I asked him to lend me fifty pesos and charge them against Derek. He could deduct that sum from my wages. Don Martin went to the safe and took out a wad of dirty notes. He wetted his fingers several times and counted the money twice before he gave it to me. "This is our greatest treasure," he said.

"What is your greatest treasure?" I asked.

"Money. Anybody who has the will and the wish can make money in our great country. Money is our national treasure."

"You mean that when you look at cattle, sheep and wheat you think only of their cash value?"

"Precisely," he said. "That's why I said that money is our greatest treasure."

I nearly told him that I would soon be leaving his country behind.

"If I ever find Achaval," he said, "I'll let you know."

But by then, I thought, I shall be on the other side of the Atlantic. Nevertheless I thanked him and we shook hands, and as I shut the door I saw that he was putting the national treasure back into the safe.

Marguerita and the Turco were in the bar and a new bottle of whisky was before them.

"I never drank whisky before last night," the Turco said.

"But it grows on one. So we're having some more. We polished off two bottles last night."

"He won't have a cent left by the time we go to the station," Marguerita said.

"What has happened to you?" the Turco asked, noticing my bandage.

"I was drunk and ran into a pylon," I said.

The Turco laughed heartily, and I asked him to go to the bar and get me a glass. We were alone in the dining-room. "Marguerita," I said quickly, "you were very good to me. Here are forty pesos. You might need them some day."

"Keep your money," she said.

"Please do me the favour."

"All right," she said and before she took the money she pressed my hand against her bosom. "You are a very stupid muchacho," she said.

The Turco came with a glass and poured whisky into it.

"I have a good mind," Marguerita said to him, "to leave you and teach this muchacho here what love is. It would do him a lot of good."

"You old harlot," the Turco said affectionately. "He wouldn't even spit at you."

"You hear what he says?" she said and laughed with her young white neck well thrown back. While the Turco had been pouring out my drink I noticed that she had shoved the four ten pesos notes into her stocking.

"What are you people going to do?" I asked. I could afford to put such a gracious condescending question to them; for I knew what I'd be doing from now on.

"We'll take the train," the Turco said, "and we'll go to Rio Negro or perhaps farther."

"He's afraid of the blacksmith," Marguerita said and laughed. She stood up, bent over me and rearranged the bandage. It was time for me to go to the station. "Good-bye," I said, "and God bless you, Marguerita."

"The same to you," she said. "And fatten up your chest. The girls won't like you so thin."

"What do you know?" the Turco asked with a contented

smile. She threw her head back and her laughter followed me to the door.

The train, it appeared, was a little late. I walked up and down the platform which wasn't much of a platform as station platforms go. A large man arrived in a car, and he had ginger hair and a ginger moustache of the toothbrush variety. He spoke to the station master and his accent gave him away as a Briton. The mountains were clear in the spring weather. There was slightly less snow on them; and I felt like bowing to them and thanking them for having kept me company; for in a day or so Anatilde and I would leave them for ever.

The Briton was walking up and down too, and when we met for the third time he stopped and said, "I beg your pardon, but aren't you Mr. Edmett's brother?" I said I was his brother. "I used to be the manager of the estancia," he said, "in your uncle's time." So this was the man against whom Derek had fought an uphill fight for a year. "Now I'm looking after an estancia in Chubut," he went on. "I'm going for a holiday to B.A. How is your brother?" I said my brother was very well. "Rather a difficult man to work with." The train was approaching. "I hope you don't mind my saying so. Anyway, give him my best regards. I understand he got married. I didn't think he was the marrying type." He walked on.

The smoke of the engine was like a bent black mast. The train arrived. The engine stopped and let out a lot of smoke and seemed surprised that it had got there. There weren't many passengers. I saw a man alighting and for a moment I was afraid that he was Anatilde's brother. He wore a dark blue felt hat, and I dislike people who wear dark blue felt hats. His overcoat was black and because the shoulders were well padded, they turned up at the ends. He had a mincing gait and an impertinent face with yesterday's beard, and the stubbles were covered with powder. The man went past me and I scrutinized the other passengers, and there was a plump pleasant looking man among them but he seemed too old to be Anatilde's brother. Then to my great consternation I heard the awful man asking in a loud voice if anybody had come to fetch him from the Estancia la Mariposa.

"Here he is," said the Scotsman pointing at me.

The blue hat approached haughtily and I said to myself, oh my God, he is Anatilde's brother. "Have you been sent to meet me?" he asked. The inflexion of his voice in a distant echo-like manner reminded me of Anatilde's voice. They had the same eyebrows but there the resemblance ended. His eyes were dark, and they were the beady yet penetrating eyes of a stuffed animal.

"Yes, my brother sent me to fetch you," I said with all the amiability I could muster.

"Your brother?" he asked. His overcoat was open, and I beheld the front of a black suit with thin white stripes. He wore a pearl in his tie and his shirt was of silk.

"I am Derek Edmett's brother," I said.

"Oh," he said and gave me a smile that revealed two gold teeth. "So you're Derek's brother? Anatilde mentioned you in one of her letters. But you don't look like my esteemed brother-in-law and that, dear friend, speaks in your favour." He laughed and put his arm through mine and he went on to say that I was the sort of person he took to from the start. "I am," he said, "a good judge of character. I never liked your brother."

We had reached the station entrance and as he had to search his pockets for his ticket, he let go of my arm. I was rather relieved. "To be quite candid," he said as we crossed the rails on our way to the hotel, "I hate your brother."

"Then why did you let your sister marry him?" I asked.

"He is a very rich man," Arturo said. "But I like you."

I nodded and didn't know what to say.

"We'll have a drink at the hotel," he said. "A nice vermouth. Then we'll drive to the estancia. Where is the car?"

"I left it at the hotel. I think we'd better lunch here."

"You'll be my guest," he said. "Are you the younger brother?"

"No," I said, "I'm the elder brother."

"Then you're rich, too?"

"Not at all," I said, and added to myself: yet I'm going to take your sister away; and from a rich man at that.

"You Europeans have funny customs," he said. "The younger brother gets everything and the elder brother is poor." I grinned and hoped that my grin was as good an answer as could be expected in the circumstances. "And how is my little Anatile?"

"Very well."

"When she'll see me she'll be really happy. She loves me more than anybody I could think of."

Try to think of me, I said to myself. The Turco and Marguerita were going towards the station, carrying their tiny luggage. They waved to me and as I waved back she threw me a kiss.

"Who are those tramps?" Arturo asked.

"Friends of mine," I said.

"Your Spanish is quite good. Mind you one can notice that you're a gringo. Still, there must be gringos in this world, musn't there?"

I grinned again. At the hotel he ordered two vermouths. I said I didn't care for vermouth but that made no difference to him. "Vermouth is a very elegant drink," he said. Then he made me smoke a cigarette that tasted like straw. "Excellent cigarette," he said. "I represent the factory in the south." He produced a packet of ten and shoved them into my coat-pocket. A little later when I took out my own packet he said, "Don't be a fool, hombre. Smoke good cigarettes."

So I put back my own packet and smoked his brand of straw. During the meal he talked mostly of business. The Argentine was the land of opportunities. Any man with a little guts could go a long way and make money. It was the happiest land on earth, for it gave you ample opportunity to make money. "You should leave your brother and start on your own. You surely have a little capital of your own, even if most of the money belongs to your brother. Come to me in Bahia Blanca and I'll tell you what to do with your money. I'll double it for you in six months. You must take advantage of the opportunity of being here in our country."

I had a good mind to tell him that within a few days I would take his sister away from his great country. But of course I said nothing of the sort. I felt he should be the last of all

concerned to know about it. He paid for the meal with a fine display of swagger.

"Cheap," he said. "In Bahia Blanca I often pay three times as much, and it doesn't cost me a cent because I put it down to the firm. I tell you, hombre, it's great to live in our Criollo country."

In the car, in order to be chatty and conversational, I asked him if he knew Buenos Aires. He slapped my shoulder. "That's a great town," he said. "The women. I go up every six months or so, and I spend my nights in very posh places. I go to the Tabaris and the Armenonville and drink half a dozen bottles of champagne, and usually I have a girl on each knee. Expensive French artists, of course. I never let a vulgar tart sit at my table." Then for the first time he decided to take notice of the world around him. "What's the matter with your head?"

"I ran into one of those electric pylons in the dark," I said.

"A bit drunk?" Arturo asked and slapped my shoulder and that didn't improve my driving.

"A bit drunk," I said.

Later he reverted to Derek. "When I was told to come out to Neuquen, I immediately resolved to visit Anatilde, though that meant that I'd have to see him too. I'm fond of my little sister and for her sake I don't mind putting up with him for a night. But I couldn't stick him any longer. No, I couldn't. I don't know what is the matter with that man, but if I sat with a beautiful girl on my lap and a bottle of champagne before me and he came into the room, I wouldn't want the girl and I wouldn't want the champagne."

As we reached the boundary he took out a pocket mirror and arranged his tie and took a comb from his waistcoat pocket and brushed back his gomina sodden hair. "I musn't look untidy when my little sister sees me," he said.

I sounded the horn when we reached the gate. The door of the house flew open and Anatilde came running out. She was wearing the red pullover and had forgotten to put on a coat. Arturo shot out of the car and with extended arms advanced towards her. They embraced, and he laughed and

kissed her, and when he embraced her the second time his dark blue hat fell to the ground. I opened the gate wide enough to drive the car through. I drove it to the garage and when I returned, Derek was with them. He was leaning on his stick and Arturo looked like a pigmy beside him. A pigmy in a dark blue hat, for he had recovered it in the meantime. Anatilde was the first to notice me.

"William," she said, "thank you for bringing my brother. But William what has happened to you? Had you an accident?"

I told her that I had run into an electric pylon in the dark.

"Does it hurt, William?" she asked and came and stood beside me, and I wondered that brother and husband were so blind as all that. "No," I said.

"I am so glad," she said.

Brother and husband surely must understand.

"I think," Derek said, "that you should take your brother upstairs to his room. I'm sure he wants a wash."

I looked at him, and he was pale and his eyes were larger than usual. He stood there with his teeth dug into his underlip.

"I'll take him upstairs," said Anatilde and smiled at me and then went off with the insensitive Arturo.

Derek came over to me. "That bandage," he said, "is rather a primitive one. Come to my office. I have some first aid stuff there too."

"Thank you," I said.

"What do you think of him?" Derek asked as we went to the office.

He wanted sympathy from me and he wanted it badly.

"Oh, he's all right," I said. I had no time for sympathy.

Derek was disappointed. We reached the office and he found his first aid box. He made me sit down on a chair and took off the bandage. "You didn't get that wound from running into a pylon," he said. "Somebody hit you."

"Not at all," I said. I didn't want to give him an opportunity to tell me that he had told me that Achaval was no good.

"Did you have a fight with the Turco?" he asked.

"Of course not. Don't be silly. Nobody hit me."

"Somebody hit you either with a crowbar or a stone, or something like that."

"I told you nobody hit me."

"You needn't tell me if you don't want to."

"Don't be ridiculous."

He made me a very neat bandage, and it was much smaller than the one Marguerita had made. "You're very lucky to be alive," he said when he had finished.

"Don't be so superior," I said, "You never run into electric pylons. Of course not. You're too marvellous for words, Derek. If a pylon sees you it bows and gets out of your way."

"Probably," he said.

"It's great to be so marvellous," I said.

"Probably," he said again. "If I were you I'd have a hot bath."

"But you aren't me," I said. I stood up, and I was going to start off and tell him about Anatilde and myself. As though he had been fearing and expecting that, he stood there pale and biting his underlip.

"I must go out now," he said. "See you later." And he hurried from the office, running from my unsaid words.

"Thank you for the bandage," I called after him.

I went out of the house and walked towards the stores, I reached the stores and I realized I hadn't the slightest desire to go into the stores. So I went up to my room and sat on my bed for a while, and then I remembered the bottle of caña in the cupboard. I took it out and had a good pull at it. Then I went down and Anatilde and her brother were in the sitting-room. As he would never see her again after I took her away, I thought I should let him have this last chance of being alone with her. I went out again and found the blacksmith at the smithy. He came to the door and asked in a low voice, "You took them to Zapala?"

"Yes."

"Are they still in Zapala?"

"No, they left by train."

He nodded and swallowed hard and I wanted to move on, but he stopped me. "Did she send me a message?"

"No."

He looked at me incredulously, and while he was looking at me, I saw that it began to dawn on him that she wouldn't have sent him a message. He began to believe me. In a little while he believed me altogether. "Don Guillermo," he said in a quiet thoughtful voice, "she was all the putas put together, but I wish she was here with me."

I nodded and walked away. Would, I asked myself, Derek swallow hard like that after we left? No, pity, I warned myself, no pity.

"William!" It was Derek's voice. I turned round and he came quickly up to me.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I can't face that man," he said. "He's like a toad. I'm going off to stay with the German for the night."

"You can't do that."

"Why not?"

"You can't run away from him." I said and regretted my words, for what difference could it make to me if he ran away from Arturo? I should mind my own business. There was plenty of it.

"I think you're right," he said. He looked at me gratefully. "Thank you," he said. "It didn't occur to me that that pest would think that I was running away from him. I'll go and tell Pedro that I don't want the car."

I watched him go away and then I went into the house. I went upstairs and took another swig from the bottle. When I came downstairs the light was burning in the hall, and the hall was cold and like a pit of lost souls. I went into the sitting-room and the fire was burning, and Anatilde sat on the settee, and Arturo sat beside her with his arm round her shoulder. They both looked up and Arturo said, "It's the brother."

"William, you have a new bandage," Anatilde said.

"Yes," I said.

"Does it hurt?"

"Not now."

I went up to her and took her hand and pressed it against the bandage.

"It must hurt," she said. Her eyes were very near.

"You two are great friends," Arturo said.

"Yes, we are," I said.

"He likes me to sing to him," Anatilde said.

"It's a long time since you sang for me," I said.

"I sang for you yesterday, when you were away."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Arturo. "That is very funny."

Derek appeared. He was carrying a bottle of whisky. "Arturo," he said, "I found a bottle of whisky. My uncle's bottle. You know I hardly ever buy any drinks. I'm glad I found it. We'll celebrate this occasion."

He wasn't speaking sarcastically. He was in dead earnest. He had made up his mind to treat Arturo civilly now that he had decided not to run away from him; and he would live up to his decision.

"Whisky?" Arturo said gratified. "I am a great whisky drinker. I'm very much in favour of expensive imported drinks."

"But I thought you only liked vermouth," Anatilde said. "You remember that evening when you drank brandy and you were so ill next day."

"That happened a long time ago, you silly child," Arturo said. "Since then I have become a hard-living and hard-drinking man. Why don't you remind me of my nappies?"

"Oh, I am sorry, Arturo," she said.

The slovenly maid brought in glasses and a jug of water. Derek poured out the drinks, and Arturo told him to pour out a large one for him. "More, more," he said, and his glass was half filled with the potent yellow liquid. He was going to show off before his sister.

"Now, Arturo, tell me how you're getting on," Derek said. "I suppose this new agency will help you a lot."

"I bet it will," Arturo said. He raised his glass and half emptied it. "I will make a lot of money," he went on, "and then Anatilde will come to Bahia Blanca and you'll see what an excellent time we'll have." He finished his drink. "I'll buy her a house in Bahia Blanca."

"I hope," said Derek in a sham jocular voice, "you'll let her come here now and then."

Arturo poured himself out half a tumblerful of whisky. "Ha, ha," he laughed. "You want to know, do you?" He stared at the glass and then looked up, and his gold teeth were much in evidence. "I like your whisky," he said, "and so I'm not going to answer your question."

Derek's lips were a thin, bloodless line. Anatlilde gave me a quick frightened glance. I hoped that her strength, which I would need so much, wouldn't be wasted in the aimless bickering that lay ahead of the two brothers-in-law. For it was, in a sense, riotously funny that they were jealous of one another, and in a short while both of them would lose her. It was funny; funny indeed; and I wished I could laugh.

"I am glad you like the whisky," Derek said. He got up and went to the fire and poked it.

"You can give me some more," Arturo said. He said that loudly and it suddenly struck me that the two of them were acting in a play, and every sentence and movement were well rehearsed.

"You drink very fast, Arturo," Anatlilde said. She wasn't in the play: as a matter of fact she should have been sitting in a box. But somehow there was only standing room for the audience and that was jarring and tiring.

"My little sister," Arturo said, "doesn't believe that I can drink hard. She thinks I'm still a small kid."

Derek poured out another drink for him. "More," Arturo said. So Derek poured out more. "I drink to you, hija," Arturo said. He turned to me. "Hasn't she the most beautiful eyes in the world?"

"Yes, she has," I said, and looked straight and hard at Derek. He pretended to be unaware of me. One enemy at a time was perhaps enough for him. But I was the one enemy and high time he understood that.

"My sister tells me you know the large European towns Guillerme," Arturo said. "Did you ever see in those large towns such beautiful eyes?"

"Never," I said loudly.

Derek's eyes were still focused on the fire. There followed a silence and I thought it would never end. Anyway, nobody

made an attempt to lift its heavy substance. Luckily the door opened and the slovenly maid announced dinner.

"Where is David?" I asked Anatlilde as we went into the dining-room.

"Arturo doesn't like him," she said in a low voice.

But Derek heard her and said to me in English, "He kicked the dog the last time he was here."

I nodded noncommittally.

Arturo made a lot of noise while eating his soup. There were no drinks on the table. Anatlilde poured water into his glass and he drank the water quickly, avidly.

"How does your head feel?" Derek asked in English.

"Better," I said. He wouldn't succeed in blackmailing sympathy out of me. Sympathy was my last remaining danger.

"I think it's ill bred and rude to speak in a foreign language," Arturo said. He had finished his soup and his glass was empty. His sister poured out more water for him.

"You are quite right," Derek said. "My brother and I have acquired the bad habit of speaking English at rather an early age. I'm sorry."

I expected the explosion would come right then, but Arturo was satisfied with his little victory and let it rest there. Derek I believe, was satisfied, too.

Half-way through the meal Arturo began to tell us an involved story about one of his father's agents in Neuquen, who for some obscure reason had let him down. "He didn't keep his word," Arturo said. "There is only one thing in life that really matters and that is to keep one's word. We Criollos are famous for that all over the world." His statement went unchallenged. "To keep one's word," he went on, "is the sign of being a man. If you don't keep your word you aren't a man. If you do keep your word you can lift your head proudly." He was pleased with his short speech. The originality of his words must have appealed to him. He patted his hair. "Guillerme, do you agree with me?"

"I do," I said. The whole thing had nothing whatsoever to do with me.

"You always keep your word?"

"I think so ;" I said, and as I said that I knew I was lying. But the lie wasn't a deliberate lie, for memory came a quarter of an inch behind the words. I wished it hadn't come. It dragged me back in time more than twenty years, and the scene it had in store for me was inopportune to say the least. But I couldn't stop it.

Mary was ten and I was nine, and Derek was six years old. Mary and I were in the throes of our father hunt, and that special night to which my accursed memory led me the identity and whereabouts of our father were discussed till bedtime. Naturally Derek had no say in the matter. It didn't concern him. He felt very much out of it. When Mlle Delorme came to take Derek to bed, in order to show off before him, I said to his retreating back that next morning I would run away from home and go in search of my real father.

Derek and I shared the same room and I was led to bed at seven-thirty. I got into bed and Derek said, "Are you really going in search of your father tomorrow?" Already at that early age he had a precise grown-up way of expressing himself.

"Yes," I said, "why aren't you asleep?"

"I wanted to speak to you," he said. Usually he was asleep when I came to bed.

"What is it?"

"I should like to go with you."

"But you're not his child."

A short silence followed. "I know, but perhaps I could help you. Please let me come. I'll help you and when you find him I'll come back and fetch Mary."

"Oh, all right," I said.

"What time do we leave?"

"At six. But you must be ready at five."

"Then please lend me your watch."

He came in the darkness and took my watch which Mr. Edmett had given me. "You only want to play with the watch," I said.

"No," he said deeply hurt.

"Get dressed at five and wake me at half-past," I said.

"Better take your eiderdown with you because it'll be cold on the journey."

"Yes. Which way are we going?"

"I'll tell you in the morning. But when we find my father you musn't speak to him. You're not his child. Promise me."

"I promise," Derek said, and he wished me good night, but first he repeated my orders so that there should be no mistake, and then I turned on my side and told myself an interminable story about my prowess on horseback and the firm dignity with which I caught a wild bull charging down the genteel streets of Exmouth. I awoke at an unusually early hour and the electric light was burning, and Derek was shaking me. He was fully dressed, a strap round his eiderdown, and he was holding on to the strap and the eiderdown nearly weighed him down by its size and weight.

"I am ready," he said. He was pale and his eyes were red since he had kept himself awake most of the night. In his left hand he held the watch and it was exactly five-thirty.

"What do you want?" I asked sleepily.

"We're going to find your father."

"You stupid boy, I was only joking. Let me sleep or I'll call mademoiselle." I turned my back on him.

"Would you like coffee?" Anatilde's voice asked.

"No, thank you," I said.

"You speak as if you were half asleep," Derek said. "It isn't your wound, I hope?"

It was my turn not to look him in the eyes; and then we went back to the sitting-room and Anatilde sat down beside the fire. Arturo staggered to the bottle, almost filled his glass, looked triumphantly at his sister, and emptied the glass. He choked and some of the drink returned and wetted his waistcoat.

"That was very good," he said in an unsteady voice. "When you come to Bahia Blanca I won't let you come back here."

Derek, very unobtrusively, went to the table and took the bottle and started with it for the door. But Arturo was a keen observer.

"What are you doing with that bottle?" he hiccupped.

"I think we've had enough to drink," Derek said.

"I don't want your advice," Arturo snapped. "I want whisky."

I thought that the fight would begin. But Derek poured him out a drink and that drink put the lid on his drunkenness.

"Ah," he said, "one definitely needs whisky to sit in the same room with you." He pointed a trembling finger at Derek.

"Oh quite," Derek said.

"He drank too much," Anatlilde whispered.

"What were you whispering about?" Arturo asked.

"It was nothing important," Anatlilde said.

"Don't whisper while I'm in the house," Arturo said.

"Why shouldn't she whisper?" Derek asked.

"I didn't ask you," Arturo said.

"I think I've had enough of you," Derek said, and I saw that this was the ground he had chosen, and now he would turn and fight. "You are drunk, go to bed," Derek said.

"You heard what he said?" Arturo asked from Anatlilde, and went over to her. He was in no need of an answer. "You heard what that disgusting man said?"

"Arturo, please be calm," she pleaded.

"Calm? Do you know what it means to me that my sister married such a creature? He's not worthy to be your servant. That my sister should have thrown herself away on a man like that! You, with your beauty and he, with his ugly stupid face. Anatlilde, you married an animal of the lower orders."

He burst into tears and I sighed with relief because I had been afraid that he would go on like that for hours and hours. He wept sitting upright. He buried his face in his hands and cried loudly, and his were the copious tears of the drunk.

"What a disgusting man," Derek said in English.

"This isn't the moment to speak like that," I said, because I felt Anatlilde's shame. She, poor thing, didn't know how to handle the situation and tentatively touched her brother's heaving shoulder.

"I forgot," Derek said to me, "that he and you have a lot in common."

His remark hadn't time to sink in, for, with a comparatively supple movement, Arturo jumped up and hurled his thin lithe body against Derek. It was but a pathetic gesture. Derek grabbed his wrists without wishing to hurt him and held him at arms length. It cost him no effort.

"Now then, Arturo," he said, "calm yourself."

"You murderer," Arturo yelled, and made desperate efforts to free his wrists. Then, since it was the only logical conclusion, he passed out. He fell against Derek.

Derek held him up and said, "Anatilde, come, we'll put him to bed."

"You won't hurt him?" she asked as she opened the door.

"You know I won't," he said and lifted Arturo, and I said vaguely, "Could I help?"

Derek shook his head. But it wasn't easy to deal with Arturo. The cocksure young man with the blue felt hat had turned into a limp sack of potatoes. Eventually Derek had to lift him on his shoulder, and as he stood there ready to go out through the door, I thought of the eiderdown on his shoulder and him holding on to the strap.

Anatilde looked at me before she went out, but I was busy lighting a cigarette. I heard them go upstairs and I heard doors open and doors close, and I stood before the fire and then a door opened again and I heard footsteps. They came down the stairs and the door opened almost noiselessly, and Derek came up behind me. I turned round.

"Derek," I said, "I must talk to you."

"I didn't really mean it when I said that you and Arturo had a lot in common."

"I wasn't thinking of that. It's about Anatilde."

"I think it's a bit too late to discuss that," he said.

"No, it isn't," I said. I went to the table and took the bottle and mixed myself a strong drink. "Don't worry," I said nervously, "I won't get drunk like Arturo." I had hoped that he would go out while I was pouring out the drink. But he stayed there. So it wasn't too late for our discussion.

"Derek," I said, "I thought that I could go through with it."

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

"I thought I could take your wife away from you. Are you surprised?"

"I knew," he said slowly, "that you saw quite a lot of her. One evening I went to the stores and you were there with her, and the door was locked."

"Why didn't you tell me that you knew?"

"Because I didn't attach too much importance to it. I was certain you wouldn't let me down."

"Derek, I won't," I said. "Of course I won't."

I was deeply moved and so was he.

"I let you down that morning when you came and woke me up. You remember? We were going to look for my father."

"Yes, I remember," and he smiled.

"I feel like waking up after a long senseless night," I said. "Would you like a drink too?"

"Perhaps I would," he said.

I mixed him a drink and he raised his glass and said, "To the two brothers."

"Who must always stick together," I said.

We sat down beside the fire and in a little while we were back in Exmouth, and we talked of the garden and the dogs and mother and Mr. Edmett, and eventually we reached Mary. I had by then quite forgotten Anatilde: she had never lived with us in that garden.

"William," said Derek, "I must show you something. It is a very long letter. I was in two minds about it. But now that we've found each other again, without ever having lost each other, I think I had better show it to you. I believe you'll profit by it."

"I suppose it's a letter from Dominique," I said.

"Clever of you to have guessed it."

"I guessed it all along."

"I'll go and fetch it. There is still a drop in the bottle. Finish it."

He came back with a folder. "Here it is," he said. "Take it upstairs with you and read it. Please read it with a detached mind." He looked at his watch. "It's pretty late," he said.

"If we stay much longer down here," I said happily, "Mademoiselle Delorme will come and send us to bed."

TWELVE

I don't know why I am writing you this letter. It will be a long letter. But I know I must write it all down for myself, and it seemed to me that you would be the right person to send it to. I don't know you well; but the day before I married your sister, you wished me luck and you added that I would need a lot of it. You were right. You were only sixteen and you were so serious about it that I couldn't help asking you why you were so emphatic. You may remember that you replied that Mary and her brother William were wonderful together, but it was difficult to visualize either of them with a third party. Because you were a loyal brother and because you loved your sister so much, you urged me earnestly never to be discouraged and, you said, if I succeeded I would be the saviour of both of them. To be frank with you I thought at the time that perhaps you were jealous of their friendship, and that you had overstated your case. It didn't take me six months to realize that you were right. Here before me lies your condoling cable in which you say that you are as heartbroken as I. If that is true, and I don't doubt the truth of it, then that is one more reason for me to write this long letter.

Mary has left us but William is still in the world. You had a king and queen who were called William and Mary. I often referred to them in their presence as William-and-Mary; but Mary said that as a Frenchman I didn't understand English history and that my allusion made no sense. Needless to say I never pretended to be an expert on the history of your country. But the senior partner of William-and-Mary has

left and something must be done with the junior partner, and we must find out whether it is easier or more difficult with Mary lying in her grave. It will be difficult. I have tried and I have failed. How could I help William? He doesn't want any help from me. He is your brother and has no animosity towards you, and maybe you could help him. But how? It will help you to know the little I found out about him in seven years, and besides, I feel I must vindicate myself in my own eyes, if not in yours. I could never vindicate myself where William's mind is concerned. It was loaded against me from the start.

Your sister and brother were born in circumstances that aren't the lot of most people. Though I found nothing shocking about their origin, I could never make out why they considered themselves above the rest of us. They wouldn't admit it in so many words but they often tried to make me feel the disadvantage of having had a father. Of course they failed, but it wasn't pleasant. I must admit they had a wonderful sense of creating an atmosphere around themselves and in that atmosphere the rest of mankind weren't only outsiders, but gatecrashers too. That atmosphere was suffocating. Big words these: but I had been Mary's husband for seven years. I am proud of having been her husband. I wouldn't have had it otherwise. I can, however, tell you that it was a difficult time, and now looking back on it, I can't find mistakes on my part, though it would be so much easier for me to speak of *mea culpa* than of theirs. But the word *culpa* doesn't come in. They meant so well, and probably at this very moment William is still meaning well, and I wish one could find him a practical way out for all his well meaning. They were never happy. But I want to speak of William. When I stood in the church of Saint Antione at Neuilly (you may have seen that church, cold and somehow designed for funerals. One never thinks of baptism or confirmation in that church,) and there before me was my wife's coffin, I wasn't looking at the coffin but at William, who stood on the other side of my mother. His eyes were dry and his lips were slightly distorted as if he had toothache and his tongue were trying to soothe the tooth. He wouldn't look at me. He was lost, unhappy

and miserable. He reminded me of the words of the poet :

Dans ce val solitaire et sombre
Le cerf qui brame au bruit de l'eau
Pendant ses yeux dans le ruisseau,
S'amuse à regarder son ombre.
Un froid et ténébreux silence
Dort à l'ombre de ces rameaux,
Et les vents battent les ormeaux
D'une amoureuse violence. . . .

For the world had become a lone and dark valley for him and he has only his shadow left.

When we left the cemetery I said to my mother, "I must speak to him." My mother said, "He would hate it."—"But," I cried, "we must stand by him, we must do something for him." My mother shook her head. "Consolation is the last thing he wants." "But what does he want then?" My mother shook her head. "I think he wants nothing," she said.

So I left the cemetery empty-handed, and the love I could give no longer to Mary had been thrown away by William even before I could offer it to him. He had told my mother that all he loved in life was buried with Mary. When my mother repeated that to me, I said it was terribly wrong to say that and to feel like that, because the only loyalty we owe to the dead is to let them rest in peace. But the living need love, care and help, whereas *le bon Dieu* looks after the dead. And one is useless if one only lives on memories. All that love, care and help I wanted to give to William. His stern refusal angered me, and one night I went into my mother's room and I declared that I would go round to his flat with a revolver and tell him that if he felt like that he should kill himself, for there was no earthly use for him among the living and perhaps the dead could do something for him. My mother told me that he had left for London.

Mary and William grew up not in the image of the Creator but in the image of each other. Mary was beautiful and had an excellent brain, and she used her brain exclusively for romantic day-dreaming, and her thoughts were not of this

world. Neither were they of the other. Often I longed that she should fall in love with another man. One can fight and one can try to defeat a flesh and blood lover; the phantom lover of day-dreams was beyond me. I fought the phantom for seven years. I couldn't kill him: he wasn't tangible. I couldn't waylay him: I didn't know the roads he travelled on. I never knew whether he was listening or not, so I couldn't dissuade him from leaving my wife alone. William was his ally. It suited his own temperament to encourage his sister to lose this world without finding the other. Am I repeating myself?

Of course I was fond of him. I had tried everything to win his friendship and affection. But he had nothing to give me. You see I am trying to get to the bottom of the mystery, but the bottom is shallow. To go out into the world and take it as it is and love it and understand it, is more difficult than to watch the clouds drifting and imagine them to be castles and dragons and fairy queens. One doesn't need real generosity for that. But Mary and William thought that it was finer to live within the tiny world of their childhood memories and mutual admiration. The real world is of flesh and blood. It is hard and hits back, and takes more love than it gives. They wouldn't give to the world. At the beginning of our marriage Mary wanted to give it to me but she found it wasn't easy. It never is easy. So she kept it for herself and for William. The point was that they didn't need to give anything to each other. They were living on their childhood's capital. That was very easy.

We speak a lot of child-like natures. I have learnt that to be child-like is to be an egotist without a sense of responsibility. And it is criminal to keep the little capital that had been hoarded long before reason appeared. It is just as criminal not to dare to lose it or to add to it. According to that Jesus should have stayed with his Father and not embarked on his earthly adventure. But the terrible and miserable thing about William and Mary was that they thought they had chosen the thornier path. I remember Mary reading of the suicide of a servant girl in the *faits divers* and saying to me afterwards how brave that girl was. She wasn't brave. I tried to explain

that she had been afraid of life because to live meant to give more. To give and to give and to give! Brother and sister, however, thought that by not giving they were the greatest givers of all time.

About four years ago I thought if they were separated they might come to understand the meaning of life. I introduced William to several pleasant young girls. One of them fell in love with him. She had a pretty face and a good dowry. He didn't notice her. He would be surprised if he knew that she had loved him. He was far too busy watching the clouds in his sister's company.

I think you should know that he was a complete failure at my office. Though you met him one day in our flat, I wouldn't blame you if you didn't remember my father's cousin Eugène. He was tall, angular and his shoulders sloped. He had a large inelegant moustache. He was William's chief and I am the first to admit that he was something of a joke. William realized that at once. Poor Eugène became the butt of his wit, though that didn't stop him from piling most of his work on the victim of his jokes. So he laughed at my cousin and my cousin had to work for him.

I feel that you wonder why I didn't give William a more interesting job. Because I knew it wouldn't have improved him and he wouldn't have worked more. During my two years military service I often heard sergeant instructors saying to inefficient poilus, that they might make good generals, but because they were such bad privates they would never get there. Probably it was the same with William. I didn't consider it fair to give him a better job just because he had failed to make good in a humble capacity. He didn't deserve the chance. Besides, such a chance would have been illogical.

Let me now tell you of the death of your dear sister Mary. I know I should have told you about it at the beginning of this letter. We all believe that if we knew the details we should be happier. My father was killed during Nivelle's bloody offensive in Champagne. My dear mother pestered his company commander for details. Even long after the war she used to invite soldiers who had served with him and plied them with drinks, food and presents, trying to get the details

from them that would give her consolation. At long last, three years after the war, she found out that a piece of shrapnel had blown him to smithereens and his head was flung back into the trench which he had left but a few seconds before. That, I feared, wouldn't give her the consolation she hoped for. But next day she said with a cheerful smile to me that now she felt happier about it and would grieve less. I can assure you that once her curiosity was satisfied, she became a calmer and more resigned woman. I hasten to add that I have no gruesome details to give you. Before I go further it occurs to me that I never bragged about my loving my mother. I never refused to love other people because I was happy with my mother. Yet William thought he had found fulfilment in loving his beautiful sister. The rest of the world was less beautiful and it came after. So why worry about it. But let me return to Mary's death.

She had been suffering from headaches. They came and went and their stay increased with the years. Though our relationship was strained towards the end, a few months before her death, I went to see William and implored him to persuade Mary to see a specialist. He promised he would do so. Next day in my presence he broached the subject. "If I could be far from him," she said pointing at me, "my headaches would cease." It goes without saying that William believed her. "Why don't you leave me?" I asked her after a reassured William had left. She gave me an evasive answer, I knew that she wouldn't leave me. One marriage, one meeting with life had shown her that it demanded more than romantic day-dreams. Therefore she had no intention of repeating it. You know, for I told you, that I used to send her off with William whenever he took his official holidays. I had imagined that in each other's company, far from me, talking and exchanging ideas, suddenly like a *deus ex machina*, the truth of their unsacrificial lives would dawn on them. I was wrong. They came back more rigid than ever. I repeat they meant so terribly and seriously well. Up to a point, of course. Without giving and without sacrifice one can't go on meaning well beyond a well-defined limit. Am I evolving a philosophy for my consolation, or am I burning the incense of meditation

in front of my own image? I don't think so, but I leave it to you to judge. But I repeat I don't think so because I have felt the loss of Mary profoundly and still feel it. With all her egotism and false romanticism (the two being fundamentally the same) I wish I could resurrect her, and as I say that I do not even know whether I am telling the truth or am lying to ease my sorrow. Be that as it may, William is alive, and I wish I could help him to learn the beauty of sacrifice and the peace of giving.

I see I have made a detour, so let me return to the morning when your sister died. As I've said her headaches were getting worse and worse, and she lived on aspirin. One day she condescended to see our family doctor, an oldish man smelling of old fashioned cough mixtures and probably unaware of the work of Pasteur. He had diagnosed measles when I was nine years old and had also found the midwife when I was born. Therefore my mother had great confidence in his judgment. Mary was fond of my mother and so she believed the old man. He assured her that she was healthy and well and a little headache, he opined, was nothing out of the ordinary. He advised her to go to Dieppe for Easter. The sea air would do her headache a lot of good. I begged Mary to see a specialist and not to listen to the old doctor. She didn't heed my words. Then came the fatal morning.

I rose at eight as usual. We slept in separate rooms for the last year. It was I who had decided to take that step, and in the beginning I hoped she would come and ask me back into her bed. I don't believe that she ever became completely aware of my nightly absence. My absence belonged to reality and she wasn't interested in reality. I was in the bathroom doing my morning exercises and I heard her call out loud, "Dominique." I hadn't heard her call my name like that since the first year of our marriage. "Dominique," she called again. This time it was louder, and I had never heard her voice like that before. I put on my dressing-gown and I ran into her room. She was sitting on the edge of her bed and her face was white. Literally white, and I wouldn't have imagined that a face could be so white. "I don't feel well," she said quickly. "Where are the aspirins?" I found the

bottle of aspirins, and she was watching me as though I were performing the most important rite on earth. "It's my head," she said, "It hurts." I asked her how many aspirins she wanted and she said four. I took four aspirins from the bottle, and for a moment or so I wasn't looking at her but at the bottle.

"Won't four be too much?" I asked. "Don't be silly, William," she answered very gently in English. I looked at her and her face was no longer white: it was going grey. In my fear and stupidity I thought that was a sign that she was getting better. "Here they are," I said in English. Though my English isn't very good, I often spoke English to her and I think it rather amused her. "Put them in my mouth William," she said. "Can't you raise your hand?" I asked and hoped she would say yes, she could. "Apparently not," she said, and there was that fine useless bravado in her voice which had been her shadow throughout her life. I put the aspirins into her mouth. Her eyes were still open and they were looking at me, trying to place me. The illusion that William was at her side was going. I could see in her beautiful eyes that she was taking me in and that she was beginning to understand that it was I who stood there watching her so anxiously. Tenderness began to drift into her eyes like the moon coming out from behind the clouds. But it hadn't time to fill her eyes because her lids closed as if with a light click, and she started to breath hard and foam appeared on her lips. I ran to the telephone and first telephoned our doctor, then a nursing home we knew, and then I rang up William and told him to come at once.

William was the first to arrive and by then her eyes were open again. They were glassy because she was dead, but that edge of tenderness hadn't been swamped by death. My mother opened the door for William. (The *bonne* was nowhere to be found.) "We have bad news for you," she said. "My poor child," she added and William burst into the room, and I went out because I thought he would wish to be alone with her.

The doctor arrived and I let him go in to the room. As the doctor opened the door I saw William sitting on the bed and holding Mary's hand. I couldn't see his face. "The doctor," I said and left them. My mother then called me, and she

embraced me and said that I should leave the funeral arrangements to her. I was surprised because the idea of a funeral hadn't occurred to me. It had somehow seemed to my benumbed mind that Mary would stay in that room for ever, and as I didn't sleep in it any more, she would be undisturbed. "Of course," I said to my mother in a bright voice, "that will be very kind of you." She admonished me to look after myself and to look after William. The doctor came out of Mary's room and my mother left me with him. The doctor declared that a cerebral hæmorrhage had caused Mary's death, and I was of the opinion that she died of a tumour of the brain. Our conversation was strictly academical, almost like a consultation, till the doctor said he had never heard of a tumour of the brain. By then my mother was ready to go out and she left with the doctor.

I waited a little and then went into Mary's room. William was standing beside the bed. Either he or the doctor had closed her eyes. As her brother, you will be happy to know that her features were serene, like one asleep, and to judge by the peace of her countenance, her dream was happy. The light was on William's face and I noticed with real joy how much his features resembled those of our Mary. I went up to him, extended my arms and I said, "William, my poor William. I . . ." He didn't let me go on. He stared at me as though I had died and not poor Mary. He brushed my arm aside and hurried out of the house. I am writing this letter in the room in which Mary died.

I sleep in this room again because it makes me feel nearer to her. When I used to sleep in the other room we were very far from each other. My pain and my sorrow are mine and I shall have to grapple with them, and you have your own, and we are like travellers carrying their respective loads up a mountain path and we respect one other's strength, and therefore we make no offer to help or to relieve one another of the heavy burden. But William is alive and my mother tells me he is going to you. Beware of his love for his own sake. You belong to his past and without Mary he can but fall back on you. He will try to give you the love that belongs by rights to the world.

Do not take it from him but force him, if it is within your power, to give it to its rightful owners : his own life and the people and objects he meets in it. I want to believe that as death descended on Mary (death must be like a shroud that comes slowly from above), she understood. But William is alive and life is not like a shroud. Perhaps my letter will help you to save him ; perhaps you will be able to send him into the world which I don't think he has ever touched. First he must belong to the world, for he can only find himself through the world. But I doubt if you could help him. It must come from him. Oh, William, you who look like my dear dead wife, if only I could show you what love means !

My mother and I have chosen the plan for Mary's tombstone. A marble Notre Dame de Victoire with the Infant in her arms. The victory, I pray, will come Mary's way in the other world.

THIRTEEN

The sun came up from behind the Andes as if shot out of a cannon. It was the hot sun of Spring, but farther down south in Tierra del Fuego, it was a tepid wintry sun and the convicts shivered as they set about their daily task of serving their sentences. Further up north, the sun caressed the yellowing wheat of the Provincia de Sante Fe, and in the Pichincha at Rosario the heavy full pails were put outside the Sapho, and the girls could at last go to bed and dream of their return to France with the dowries they were acquiring so diligently. In Corrientes and Misiones the sun was like a burning fire scorching everything his rays touched. But over Zapala he was the youth of Spring and the first shafts awakened Achaval, who grumbled and touched William Edmett's watch in his coat-pocket. He rose, folded the blanket he had bought with the stolen money, and took a swig from the bottle. The

bottle would soon be empty. He started along the mule-track. He wished he knew where the track was taking him. Anyway, he was going north.

In a third-class compartment of a train on the Bahia Blanca line the Turco opened his eyes and saw how dirty the window-panes were in the sunlight. Marguerita's heavy face was on his shoulder and the sun picked it out. He looked at her and she was snoring a little, and he liked the heat of her body more than the heat of the sun. It was far more alive. That moment it seemed to him that he was a great fine chap and the world with its treasures and mysteries belonged to him. His heavy hard worked hand touched her arm. She grunted in her sleep and he smiled delightedly.

Don Francisco was standing in the doorway of his hut and he was thinking of his black horse.

Derek Edmett was already up. He stood at the window and watched the sun lighting up the rocky land, the corrugated iron rooftops, in short the universe he had built for himself. David was snoring beside the bed. A peon was coming from the bunkhouse and Derek remembered that that man would have to drive the bull to the newly fenced-in meadow on the other side of the river. He was a bit sleepy. He liked regular hours, and if he went to bed after nine-thirty he wasn't at his best the next morning. Not that he minded having stayed up last night. The conversation with William had been interesting. Poor William, he thought. Yes, poor William who hadn't the gift to build and to rule. How weak he was. There had been moments, he admitted, when he had thought that William's unaccountable infatuation with Anatilde might upset matters. But nothing upsetting could come from that quarter. Nevertheless, he would have to give him a good dressing down.

He left the window and looked at Anatilde sleeping in the large double bed. She had very dark eyelashes which belied her green eyes. The eyelashes trembled a little against the cheeks. She was sleeping on her side, yet he could see the half circles the eyelashes made. Suddenly he was sorry for her. For she was a woman and therefore of no real consequence. Probably it was the inherent weakness of woman-

hood that accounted for her going that afternoon to the stores and spending an hour or so in the company of poor William. They were both weak. But William was his brother. You must forgive a brother. It was a different matter where a wife was concerned. He felt he was getting angry, and because he didn't approve of anger, he turned round and went to the bathroom.

The water was lukewarm. It had been his habit to throw a few shovels of coal on the fire in the boiler-house before he went to bed. Last night he had forgotten it. He was proud of the boiler-house and the plumbing. Uncle Charles hadn't been keen on plumbing. The boiler-house had been his own work. The boiler came from Buenos Aires but the installations had been done by him. The mayor of Zapala had lent him a visiting plumber; his peons had helped; but the idea and the driving force had come from him. It was no use running the lukewarm water. He turned it off and ran a cold bath, and when he got into it he was surprised that water could be so cold. He lost his breath and his body was turning blue. He washed himself and splashed the water all over his shoulders and neck, and as he got out, warmth began to rise in him, and by the time he had dried himself he was ready for anything; and he was no longer angry. It had been a capital idea to make William read that letter. Perhaps he wouldn't even bother to give Anatlde a ticking off. William's repentant attitude would do the trick. It was grand to be the master of one's fate; and he never had and never would abuse his strength and his power.

Anatlde was still sleeping, but David was awake. "Do you want to go out?" he asked. David wagged his tail without much enthusiasm. "You poor old rheumatic dog," Derek said and lifted the dog and carried him downstairs. He came out into the sunshine and deposited the dog on the grass. He looked round. The gate was shut. A sheep dog stood on the other side of the gate and growled at David. David stared at Derek and pretended there was no sheep dog about.

"Go away," Derek shouted to the sheep dog. The dog went away.

"Don't you worry, David," Derek said and went indoors. He looked into the sitting-room which smelt of stale whisky. Arturo had dropped a silver lighter on the carpet the night before, and Derek picked it up and put it on the table. Then he went upstairs and knocked on William's door.

"Come in," William said. He was fully dressed and with his handkerchief he was trying to clean the silver frame of Mary's photograph. "I wish I knew," he said, "how one cleans silver."

"One cleans silver with silver polish," Derek said.

"Of course. How stupid of me."

"I'll draw the curtain for you," Derek said. The lamp was still burning and the bed hadn't been slept in. He went to the window and let the sun in, and the sun went straight for the photograph.

"How beautiful she was," William said.

"Yes," said Derek. "And she was the only woman who had brains. I often thought she should have been a man."

"I never thought that," William said. He lifted the folder. "Thank you for letting me read that letter." He tried to smile but he was too nervous.

"Thank you," Derek said and took the folder from him.

They stood there in silence and the sun was making inroads into the dark room.

"You shouldn't have let me read that letter," William said.

"It is a very intelligent letter," Derek said. "I think it will do you a lot of good."

"I am sure it will," William said, and his nerves were under control and he smiled. "I am going to take Anatilde away from you," he said and smiled again. "I never kissed her, we never even spoke of it, but if Dominique is right, which he probably is, by God I'm going to give life its due through Anatilde."

"What are you talking about?" Derek asked. "Are you off your head?"

"Derek, I'd rather kill you than give up Anatilde."

"You rat," Derek said and he took a step forward.

"That won't help," William said.

Derek stopped. They were standing chin to chin and as

William didn't move, he stepped back. "So you lied to me last night," he said.

"I didn't lie. You've interrupted me in my packing."

"So you're packing?" Derek said.

"I've been packing on and off the whole night."

William put out the electric radiator and went and opened the window, and the air, heated by the sun and tempered by the snow of the mountains, came in spiral-wise, full of the vertigo of spring.

"Now I'm going to speak to you," William said.

"You needn't," Derek said. "I'm through with both of you."

He meant that. He felt himself towering so high above them that he realized that for him the best course to take was to help them to get out of his life. Abruptly he remembered the time when Anatilde had had the flu. It had interfered with his habits and daily routine. Tomorrow or next week she might have a cold or bronchitis. And he wouldn't have to know about it. In a year's time she might have a bad tummy ache and he would be blissfully ignorant of it.

"You shouldn't have let me read that letter," William said again. "I was so proud of myself last night. Sacrifice. What a wonderful word that is. In order to keep our dead nursery intact, I was ready to sacrifice Anatilde and her happiness. I would have enjoyed my own sacrifice a lot. You see she never lived at Exmouth and her father didn't breed bulldogs. I decided last night that it was shameful to steal my brother's wife. What an opportunity for sacrifice, beautiful complete sacrifice. But now I know that if I gave up Anatilde I'd be again letting the world down. According to Dominique I always had let the world down. My sacrifice, my sobbing on my brother's shoulder, would have been complete self-adulation. Floodlit by sacrifice." He raised his voice and it was loud and harsh. "Floodlit by sacrifice. But only me. Anatilde wouldn't have even entered into it. Anatilde would have remained in the dark cold night. But Anatilde needs me and it's more difficult to love one's neighbour than to admire oneself."

"Cheap trash," Derek said. He spoke scornfully and somewhat mechanically.

William put his long hand on Derek's shoulder.

"It isn't trash," he said. "Please understand me. It was you who made me read Dominique's letter."

"Take your hand off my shoulder," Derek said.

"Sorry, but I have acquired that sort of personal touch here in the Argentine, your adopted country."

They were silent for a while and then Derek said, "Go on."

"At times I thought that I should murder you. You know I'm not a murderer, so you might have the grace to smile." He waited and as Derek didn't smile he went on. "I'm not a cad. I was just undeveloped, vain and egotistic. But now I know I'd be a cad if I backed out. I know I could live without Anatilde. I was forced to live without Mary and I survived. I would survive the loss of her, too. You know I've never even kissed her. That in a way is a further proof of our love. You can see for yourself that till almost the very last minute all my thoughts centred round my overblown ego. And you. My brother. My childhood; and all that according to Dominique is something one hasn't achieved. It is just oneself because one was born with it. The world doesn't enter into it. Anatilde is the world."

He stopped and unexpressed obscure thoughts seemed to make him a little older and less nervous.

"You hypocrite," Derek said and wished he could fly into a temper, but there was no anger in him. He was a spectator, and he wondered uneasily what it was that was giving him a sense of satisfaction.

"No," William said, "I'm not a hypocrite. Quite the contrary. You see I'm not saying the obvious thing. I'm not telling you that you weren't a good husband to her. I'm not telling you that she was withering under your lofty austere weight. None of that is my business. But I'm telling you right now that I'm throwing self-immolation to the wind and I'm going to live a long life with Anatilde, and I'm going to make her happy and will try to forget myself in her happiness. Sorry Derek, but we shan't embrace with tears in our eyes over our defunct cots." He smiled and went and sat

down on his bed. "Here is your last chance. Kill me if you can. Don Francisco must surely have taught you how to use a knife."

Looking down on him Derek thought that he seemed indecently young for an elder brother; and how much he resembled Mary. "She loves you?" he asked.

"She loves me," William said.

"A woman's love," Derek said and he enjoyed the disdain in his voice.

"Yes, a woman's love," William said. "Not a brother's love."

"And what do you intend to do?"

"I have my return ticket. I have a hundred pounds left. I'm going to exchange my first-class return ticket for a third-class ticket."

"You needn't do that."

William looked at him quickly. "Thank you," he said, "but we must accept facts and a third-class ticket is one of the facts. We'll go to England. I'll get a job and if I don't then we'll starve till I get a job. That's life." He chuckled. "Do you mind if I go and tell Anatilde?"

"She's still in bed," Derek said.

"I'll wake her up," William said.

Now is my chance, thought Derek, to hit him. He was much stronger than William. He could knock him down easily. "I don't see any reason why you shouldn't wake her up," he said.

They both turned to the door which had opened and the slovenly maid shoved her rubicund face in.

"Your brother-in-law," she said to Derek, "says he is very sick."

"We'd better have a look at him," Derek said.

The two brothers went out of the room and Derek opened the door of the room opposite. Arturo was sitting up in bed. He looked sickly but contented; like a man who had achieved great things. "I am very sick," he said. "I will spend the day in bed. I need a lot of sleep. How many bottles of whisky did I drink?"

"You didn't even finish one bottle," Derek said.

"I don't believe you." He mused for a short while. "But it was an amusing evening," he said and flashed his gold teeth.

"William is taking Anatilde away," Derek said. "Your sister and my brother are going off together."

"Miercoles," Arturo exclaimed, "that is a good joke." He laughed and his gold teeth laughed with him. "Your brother, my sister." He shook with laughter.

"Sleep as long as you like," Derek said.

"I need a lot of rest," Arturo said, lying back comfortably. The blankets moved as he stretched his legs luxuriously. He remembered the joke and laughed, and the blankets shook.

Derek and William left him and in the corridor Derek said, "You know the door. I'll be downstairs." He walked to the landing and called back, "I don't want to see her if I can help it. Don Francisco will drive you to Zapala. I'll tell him."

William listened to his footsteps as they descended the stairs and crossed the gloomy hall. Anatilde, thought William, would be saved from that gloom and that cold. Funny that he had been afraid of hitting Derek from behind. He had nearly hit Anatilde from behind. He opened the door and looked leisurely round in the bleak bedroom. It wasn't a woman's room and after she had left it no trace of her would remain behind. If Derek divorced her for desertion he would be technically right. But only technically.

Anatilde was still sleeping and in her sleep she had pulled up her knees, and she seemed uncomfortable and tiny in the large sedate bed. And she seemed cold, too. Like the floor of the hall downstairs. William sat down on the bed and touched her knee. It was the first time he had touched it, and he didn't bother to register the sensation of having touched it for the first time. She opened her eyes and her eyelashes took many long seconds in making their backward journey. The green eyes blinked on account of the sun.

"Anatilde," William said. He bent forward and kissed her cheek.

"William," she said, and her right hand touched his shoulder.

"Today," he said, "you're going away with me to Europe. We'll go to England."

"Is that true?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "and Derek knows."

She waited and let that sink in. "So I am going with you," she said.

"We won't have a train till tomorrow, but we'll spend the night at the Hotel Universal." He spoke in a practical voice. One had to be practical and matter of fact. "I think you should get up now," he said.

He watched her getting up, and it was as familiar as falling asleep every night. She stood beside him, and he put his hands on her slightly too large hips and the warmth of her body came through the cheap chemise. "I'll have to make a lot of money to buy you silk chemises," he said.

She bent down and kissed his forehead. It was a kiss of peace.

"It is so good," she said, "to be able to do it and not only to think of it." William looked up at her. "We will have children, won't we?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"Derek didn't like children. He said they made too much noise."

"Our children will make a lot of noise." His hands left her hips. "Hurry," he said.

"Yes, William," she said and put on her simple dressing-gown.

"Arturo is sick," he said. "He is in bed."

"So he won't wave good-bye to us," she said with a smile.

William blushed and suddenly felt extremely sorry for Dominique. They would go and see him some day in Paris. Anyway, he must thank him.

"I don't think," he said, "we'll have much time between the trains in Bahia Blanca."

"Yes, I thought of that," she said and went to the bathroom.

William rose and walked to the window. Derek and Don Francisco were standing outside the house. David was with them.

"I'll buy her a young dog with a lot of spirits as an atonement for David," William said to the window.

Outside the house Don Francisco was listening carefully to Derek.

"It will get about," Derek was saying, "But I expect that. Tonight I'll drive Don Arturo in myself."

No, you won't, Don Francisco said to himself, you'll have the time of your lives mourning for wife and sister.

"I'll get back as soon as I can," he said aloud.

"You in my place would have killed him," Derek said, "but one can't settle matters like that."

"No, one can't," Don Francisco said and spat, and it missed David by an inch. "One is always well rid of any woman," he said. "I'll be coming round in the evenings and we'll discuss farm business the same way as we used to before you got married."

"We will," Derek said.

"Are they going to Europe?"

"I suppose so."

Don Francisco spat again.

"Tell Pedro," Derek said, "to saddle me a horse. I'll ride over to the German."

"Better take Lilly."

Derek said that Lilly would do him well. He took a letter from his pocket. "Give that to Don Guillermo," he said. "I'll be back in the afternoon."

Don Francisco nodded and made a gesture which implied that it was good riddance to bad rubbish. But, it might have implied too, that he was looking forward to the long agricultural conversations ahead of them. He waited till Derek disappeared on the other side of the gate. The dog had gone with him. Don Francisco went into the house, and because he didn't know his way about upstairs, he stopped on the landing and shouted, "Don Guillermo."

William came out of his bedroom.

"If it suits you," Don Francisco said, "we'll leave in an hour's time."

"That suits us," William said.

"I am glad for your sake that you're going back to Europe."

William thanked him and Don Francisco handed him Derek's letter. William shoved the letter into his pocket and Don Francisco left. In an hour's time Anatilde and William came out of the house. She was wearing the coat Derek had bought her at Harrods in Buenos Aires. Don Francisco and the car were waiting for them.

"Please help me with the luggage," William said.

They carried out the suit-cases and the Indian stood at a little distance, watching them intently.

"Come with me," William said to the Indian.

Slightly frightened the Indian followed him to the stores. He opened the door, went in, took down the blanket the Indian had coveted and gave it to him.

"It's too expensive," the Indian said. "Besides, Spring is here."

"It's a present," William said. The Indian didn't understand him.

"Take it," William said and turned his back on the Indian and went to the till and took out all the money, and then he made out a cheque and the price of the blanket was added to the cheque. He pushed the cheque into the till and thought, there, he was already breaking into his hundred pounds.

"We will be very poor," he said to Anatilde as he got into the car.

She nodded and smiled, for she wasn't frightened of that sort of poverty. As the car drove out of the compound they saw the Indian with the blanket on his arm trotting towards the huts, and his countenance was solemn and preoccupied.

In the car William opened Derek's letter.

"There is a favour I must ask from you and I expect you to do it. Don't tell Anatilde that we're half brothers.

"P.S. Keep me informed of your movements. Good luck."

"He is a fine man," William said.

"Who?" she asked.

"My brother."

"If you say so it must be true. You know him. I don't."

At the Hotel Universal Don Francisco said good-bye to William.

"Have a drink," William said.

"No," Don Francisco said. He was on the other side of the gulf. He and Derek would have long talks in the evenings; he and William would never meet again. Anatilde he ignored.

"Que le vaya bien," he said.

"Que le vaya bien," William said.

Don Francisco looked at Anatilde, and then he turned away and got back into the car.

They went into the hotel and the clients were gathering for the midday meal. The proprietress gave William the same room he'd had the night before. They shut the door and Anatilde said, "We are alone." She took off her coat and stood there in her red pullover and watched William lighting a cigarette.

"You will teach me to speak your language," she said.

"Yes," said William.

"I have such a lot to learn."

"So have I."

He went to the door, opened it and the sun moved in, and a few sheep bleated in the distance. There was a puddle around the well.

"Pray for the intentions of the donor," William said slowly.

She looked inquiringly at him.

"That was the first lesson," he said.

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